NOTHING TO LOSE

Using Curiosity to Destroy Hesitation, Procrastination and Limiting Beliefs

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Preface

Nothing to Lose is simply the best title I could have imagined for this book. In all my many years of studying self-confidence — research that has essentially consumed my entire life — I have observed a theme: the state of having nothing to lose. It is the most appropriate and concise summary of confidence and authentic living. You become completely free to be whatever the hell you truly are, underneath the performance you show the world, when you're willing to lose anything to maintain your integrity.

Almost every unhelpful self-development or philosophical book I've ever read has a common underlying belief — that you must get something external to improve your life. Ironically, even books that promote things like "letting go of the outcomes" and "autonomy" still seem to end up using these mindsets as just another strategy to get something.

Ever known someone who had literally nothing to lose? When someone truly has nothing to lose, they are given an opportunity that we should all be begging for. They are forced to rely totally and utterly on themselves. All petty fears and insecurities are gradually eliminated as their brains come to understand the levels of danger and freedom they are experiencing simultaneously — danger because there is no safety net for any decision, and freedom, because there is a complete absence of limitation.

Some people cannot handle this level of freedom. I used to work with some homeless people and often the damage they had experienced on their journey was simply too traumatic for them to handle. Freedom while in that unhealthy state is only perceived as danger and the fear is too overwhelming. The homeless are not the only ones unable to thrive in their total freedom.

Many of us seek comfort most the time because we're afraid of the alternative; responsibility. We don't believe we'd survive the complete discomfort that is guaranteed to come with the loss of everything. The mere sensation of nervousness is enough to completely control our decision making. We just don't trust ourselves. We feel we can't rely on ourselves to get through the predicted setbacks to come out better on the other side. So we hold back, avoid anything painful, and gently but surely condemn ourselves to a mediocre, fear-ridden and fragile existence.

We become victims to our dependence on external rewards, like money, substances and social approval, and through this dependency the Universe will destroy our confidence completely. Anything from a big break-up through to a mere look of disapproval can ruin all sense of self-worthiness. We're terrified of experiencing these losses, so we avoid anything that could lead to them, and in doing so we tragically miss out on being honest, connecting deeply, and being able to genuinely enjoy life.

We sacrifice a meaningful existence simply to reduce the risk of losing things we never really possessed in the first place. Can you really own a person, or a job, or even your money? If something can be taken away, did you ever truly have it? Your belief that you can own something external to begin with is the catalyst for a destructive pattern of thinking that leads only to one place: neediness.

When you've lost everything, when you are no longer attached to keeping anything, you'll come to the realization that something yet remains. When there is no attachment to money, possessions, or reputation, when there is no neediness, something hidden is brought to the surface. In this book,

we'll be calling this something values. These values will bring out every strength you didn't know you had.

And when you see this strength you'll realize it is completely satisfying through its mere existence. When you see yourself as psychologically strong, as confident, you'll find your need for possessions, security and approval diminishes rapidly. You won't require anything else because you'll already have everything you'll ever need. Things like courage, resourcefulness, assertiveness, compassion, wisdom, persistence, acceptance, and most importantly, shameless honesty.

When you are shameless, in total acceptance of your truth, there is no such thing as weakness. There are merely areas to be developed for your own satisfaction.

Let's put it simply. Imagine, if for just a week, you behaved as if you had nothing to lose. And I don't mean going on a bender of illicit substance shopping and athletic sexual behavior. I'm talking about doing all the things you've always wanted to do but held back on. Saying those things you always wished you could say. Relieving yourself of any pressure to win, retain and impress. No people-pleasing or showing off. No talking yourself out of things. No bullshit. Just your best attempt to live like a person whom you would respect and admire.

In this book I have some complex ideas I'd like to share with you. They're not complex in the find the square root of x sense of the word; more, they are difficult to accept. Many of these ideas will go against beliefs you've taken for granted your entire life. Beliefs such as you need other people to like you. Beliefs such as you can read other people's minds and guess what they are thinking. Beliefs such as you need to obtain external things to have a good life. Particularly, we'll attack the belief that you're not already complete.

And, more than anything else, any beliefs you have that make you feel like you cannot be openly honest all the time. Having nothing to lose is the ultimate freedom to be honest. With this book I hope to show you a new perspective on how you think, one that could give you the same honest freedom that someone who has nothing to lose gets to experience every single day.

I don't ask that you believe me. You shouldn't. The only way you can know if what I share in this book actually works for sure is to test if yourself. Try to prove it wrong. Over and over again, until you perfect it into what works best for you.

One last note.

I use the word authenticity to symbolize the concept of living in a way that's true to your unique values. It doesn't actually mean that sometimes you are not you. You are always you and always will be. You literally cannot ever be anyone else. But you can live in a way that you're ashamed of, guilty for, and regret on your deathbed, or you can live a different way. Authenticity is the word I use for living the truthful way that frees you from regret.

Chapter One: We're All Criminals

I'm not exaggerating here. You're a criminal. I'm a criminal. We're all breaking laws. We just don't realize it.

The entire human race, its survival and success, are completely dependent on confidence and authenticity. I now believe this to be a certainty, which is why I'm writing this series of books (this book is the first of three). I have spent nearly a decade being faced with the serious issues triggered by low self-confidence and inauthenticity. My definitions of both of these terms will be explored throughout this book. For now, just stick with what you believe these words to mean.

We can see it in the educational systems, where insecurity about financial independence leads us to funnel children into batches and categories designed to prepare them for "safe" employment rather than building on their individual strengths. We see it in the justice system, where we allow our petty desire for revenge to override proven and effective methods for reducing reoffending rates. We see it in terrorism, violence, hateful protests and online bullying. People with low self-confidence, lashing out in pain and confusion, are creating an extremely harmful world.

And there are the others, maybe you're one of them, who may not be causing easily measurable harm but are behaving in a harmful way nonetheless. You may not be a terrorist or bully, but perhaps you're fake with your work colleagues about how you really feel, which leads to them making incorrect assumptions about you. Maybe you pretend to like people so they'll like you, eat sugary treats to deal with loneliness, or feel stressed all the time because you're focused on achieving outcomes instead of just enjoying life. The scary thing is you probably have no idea how much harm you're causing, both to yourself and others. That's one of the main issues we'll try to tackle in this book — our lack of self-awareness.

Confident people are highly unlikely to harm others intentionally. Because they have no neediness, there is no desire in them to take from others, so they give instead. They do not hide who they are or allow others to believe mistruths about them. They live via a code of honor, willingly sacrificing popularity for integrity and doing what is right for them rather than what is easy or what will be approved of by others. They are centered, able to ride their emotions without shame, and make rational decisions based on their version of the truth.

But how the hell do you become "confident" and "authentic"? What do those words even mean? I hear you, I do, and that's why I'm writing this book. Because I believe I have found the answers to those questions, or more accurately, I believe I can show you how to find the answers for yourself. Through my work over the years, I have seen patterns emerge and consistent rewards being generated by switching to more confident and authentic behavior. I've seen this in my coaching clients, Brojo members, the offenders and staff I managed, and of course, in myself. You don't need to trust me on this. Instead, I invite you to test me. I don't want you to read this book and believe everything I say; instead I want you to actively experiment with my ideas to figure out for yourself whether they will help you.

Let's turn back the clock for a minute. I'd like to share with you where this all started — my search for the meaning of confidence — and explore why I like to talk about criminal offenders so much when it comes to discussing confidence.

For four years, in my early twenties, I spent almost every work day sitting in conversation with criminal offenders and their families, trying to help them rehabilitate and live in a more successful

way. I searched high and low, as did every forensic psychologist and rehabilitation enthusiast in the world, trying to figure out what caused some people to commit crimes while others didn't. I was endlessly fascinated by trying to find the missing link — some behavioral or emotional trigger that, if treated, would turn someone's life around. Years passed before I realized the answer was right in front of me, so obvious as to be beyond doubt. Low self-confidence.

I didn't see it because I thought of these "offenders" as somehow different than me. Therefore, whatever their issue was that caused them to commit crimes, I incorrectly assumed it would not be something I would have, know about, or understand. I figured it would be something foreign to me because I had never committed serious criminal acts (by my own judgment, of course… ahem). And that's the fallacy; I saw their behavior as different to mine simply because it was illegal.

Do you do that? Do you separate criminal behavior — that deemed to be illegal by society — from other forms of harmful behavior? I'd like you to plant a seed in your mind right now. Let go of your ideas about right and wrong, legal and illegal, good and bad. Instead, allow yourself to consider all behavior as either helpful or harmful. Start allowing a question to form in your mind: "What do I do that harms my life or the lives of others?"

I remember having a conversation with an enlightened colleague at Corrections. At the time I was complaining about one of the offenders I was supervising, who had just finished having a massive temper tantrum at me for about an hour, effectively ruining my day. Exasperated, I turned to my colleague with despair. "Jesus, what a nightmare!" I exclaimed. "How the hell do you handle these guys?"

My colleague looked at me knowingly and simply said, "That's why he's here." Her words hit me like a bolt of electricity. I experienced that sudden, slightly pleasant shock that goes through your mind when you have an insight. I thought I knew what she meant; that I should accept his temper because it's part of the problems that require rehabilitation. Then, a few days later, a deeper meaning occurred to me. His underlying self-worth issues caused all of his harmful behavior — not just the crime, but his temper tantrums, inability to communicate clearly, and everything else he did to sabotage his success. I thought I had solved the puzzle. But there was even more to come.

Criminal offenders' tempers get them into trouble many times, and as a probation officer, I was simply another person on a long list of victims getting a taste of their problematic behavior. That much was easy enough to comprehend. But the deeper realization was something I could never have expected or prepared for, and it came to me from an unexpected source.

One day, I was assigned to manage a guy who was the same age as me and lived in the same area. We almost went to the same school. He was on Supervision for charges of drunk driving (something I had also done a few times) and threatening a policeman with a hammer. There was something that disturbed me about working with him. It wasn't that he was difficult, quite the opposite; it felt like we could have been good mates had our paths crossed under different circumstances. I even remember seeing crumbs of cannabis on his bench one afternoon and thinking, "Shit, that's right. I left some on my bench too."

I think that's when it hit me. My mind reeled as it all fell into place. I was seeing a reflection of my own life right in front of me in that moment. This so-called criminal offender was a young guy, who enjoyed partying and getting high. He was a guy who wouldn't harm a fly except one day someone showed up at his house unexpectedly and he picked up a hammer in case there was trouble because he lived in a rough neighborhood. That someone turned out to be a police officer.

I can't remember exactly when the realization happened, but it was a rude awakening. Every time I spoke to this guy, I felt more and more uncomfortable. Finally, the dam broke and I saw the truth.

He was me.

I am not, and have almost never been, a violent person (except in self-defense and I still got my arse kicked on those occasions anyway). Yet I had an almost twin-like connection to this man because we were both suffering from our own behavior. His problem behavior led him to get reckless and make stupid decisions, like drunk driving, and he would end up in trouble with the law. My problem behavior led me to feel immense frustration, boredom and anxiety, and got me into trouble in my social life and career. He drove drunk to overcome social fears; I got wasted at parties to overcome social fears. He fought loudly with his partner due to fear of being abandoned; I avoided confrontation due to fear of being abandoned. He smoked weed due to get rid of his anxiety; I binged on sugar to get rid of my anxiety.

I was no "better" than this man. I'd simply tried to cope with my own confidence issues in a slightly different way. We were both dealing with pain poorly, and only our life circumstances separated us. If being a manipulative and lying Nice Guy was a crime, I would have been his cellmate rather than his probation officer. We were no different, just like we are no different than you or anyone else. We all do stupid, harmful shit when we don't know how to manage our inner pain, and afterward we often feel guilty about it. This is essentially no different to criminal behavior.

Some common examples of harmful behavior will appear in the lives of those who read this book. The one I see the most is hiding emotion. We will pretend we feel "fine" as often as possible to give people the impression we are strong, stable and independent. This becomes an automatic process, where you give the appearance of a "positive" mood as soon as unfamiliar people show up, even if you're feeling tired, grumpy or antisocial.

Or how about gossiping? You might join in a conversation about someone else behind their back, just to connect with the person who began the conversation, even though you'd hate for someone to do this to you.

You commit confidence crimes every day, and you lie to yourself about it so the guilt won't hurt so much.

There are, of course, some exceptions. Many psychopathic and antisocial personalities have inflated self-worth and feel nothing but pleasure during their crimes. However, these are a tiny percentage at best of the overall population, and it is arguable as to whether they experience genuinely recognizable satisfaction or fulfilment from their behavior. In my eyes, they are the outlying exceptions that prove the rule. The rule being that most harmful behavior, legal or not, can be rationally linked to a painful view of oneself, a.k.a. low self-confidence.

One reason that society looks down on its criminal population is because we consider "them" to be somehow different to "us." We think criminal behavior is more harmful than ours… but is it really? In some cases, it may appear to be obviously more harmful, such as murder and rape. But what about theft? If you're fake with someone in a relationship, then aren't you stealing their precious hours? If you mislead someone for years and cause them to miss out on better companionship in life, is that really less harmful than stealing a car?

After some years at Corrections, I became a more effective probation officer and was able to help some parolees completely transform their lives. Ultimately, this is what led me to become a coach. The reason I suddenly excelled with this particular group of people is because I discovered genuine

empathy. Not the bullshit pretend empathy where you believe you know someone else's pain and yet in reality you see yourself as better than they are.

I was humbled by the realization that I was not better than the serial criminal seated across from me because I also chose to deal with my confidence problems in an unhelpful way. The guys I worked with must have felt this come through and known that I wasn't like the others who judged them. Instead, they knew I was aware that I was simply a noncriminal version of them, which is perhaps why I was able to get through to some of them.

The first thing I started doing was making sure I would be willing to do anything I asked from them. Any new tool or exercise we were told to use with them, I first used on myself, forcing myself to answer the probing questions and do the sometimes patronizing homework. I questioned my own behavior even more than I questioned theirs and then went a step further and started openly challenging my own beliefs.

Through this, a remarkable pattern started to emerge. In the areas of my life where I felt confident in my abilities, things went very well and I was able to quickly adapt to unpredicted changes, upsets or opportunities, in ways that were often helpful. In areas of my life where I behaved with integrity and authenticity (there were only a small few to begin with), I felt most at peace and enjoyed my time effortlessly. The more I increased the number of things in my life that fit into one of these categories — confidence or authenticity — the more I enjoyed life overall and the more success I was able to measurably achieve. Finally, when I increased the amount of my life that allowed both confidence and authenticity to flourish in, I began to feel powerful.

THE HARM CAUSED BY LOW CONFIDENCE

Let's have a look at a few of society's most prevalent and harmful issues. See if you can identify your own tendencies as we go through the examples of lying, career dissatisfaction, violence and neediness.

Lying comes from an insecurity in your own beliefs. You are so afraid of the outcome of being honest that you'd prefer the safety of hiding the truth. An authentic person, on the other hand, will happily allow you to make your own decision about their truth and therefore sees no need to hide it. When you hide who you really are, you allow people to invest in your pretend-self, which is a deliberate act of self-serving deception on your part. These poor people may make decisions that change the course of their life based on who they think you are. You may think you don't really lie, but let me ask you: Do you sometimes hide your emotional reactions? Do you ever allow someone to think you're better or worse than you are? Do you hold back to avoid confrontation? These are all lies.

How about career dissatisfaction, which comes from doing something you don't want to do or doing something you like but feeling pressured and unable to do it your own way? Authentic people do not settle for anything less than what they enjoy. When you stay in a job you hate, you're depriving someone else, who may love it, of the position. You're depriving the world of the productivity you're capable of when you're engaged in your calling. The wonders you could create are selfishly sacrificed for an insecurity about money. Everybody is missing out on what you are capable of, and most of all you're missing out on what you are capable of.

Violence comes generally from either wanting to control someone ("instrumental" violence) or an inability to express rage in a helpful way. A confident person does not give in to the needy compulsion to control others, and can manage the way they express their mood. I imagine it's

obvious what harm violence does to society and individuals within it. I've seen it ruin the lives of entire extended families and even whole cultures.

Neediness comes from a belief system that sees only scarcity — a lack of resources — which usually drives people to sacrifice creativity in favor of acquisition. Confident people feel content just being alive and feel no strong urge to chase resources. Their behavior tends to invite an abundance of resources to come into their life, which they then utilize to increase quality of life. When you're needy, you automatically become manipulative. You will sacrifice your integrity in order to take something from someone else. Maybe it's money, maybe it's approval, or it might even be sex. You steal from others to fill the hole in yourself instead of realizing the truth that you are already complete.

Authenticity is about an understanding that anything undertaken without truth will lead to misery, particularly in the unforeseeable long-term future. It may appear now that lying will help you, yet how often has it come back to bite you in the long run or hung over your head like a depressing storm cloud? Confidence is about being able to rely on yourself to behave in a way that will bring you satisfaction, regardless of outcomes. When you're confident, you wouldn't trade places with anyone else in the world, even if they have "more" than you.

As I started applying the concepts we'll discuss in this book, I noticed my problematic behavior start to change, and as weird as it sounds, I was able to watch myself get out of my own way. I saw there was not just one "Dan," there were many, and they all had different ideas about the right thing to do. I started to appreciate how difficult it is for a criminally-minded person — indeed, for anyone — to choose a "right" decision, because to each and every one of us our decisions always feel like the right decision at the time. Only later are we forced to face the sometimes painful inaccuracy of such assumptions.

Contrary to popular belief, very few offenders are genuinely without remorse. Most do feel badly about what they've done, and we can all learn from this. The reason criminal offenders are capable of breaking the law is twofold. First, their brains are able to prioritize their emotional needs over their belief in obeying the law. And second, they are able to use processes such as justification, minimization and avoidance, to reduce the pain of any guilt they feel afterward. This enables them to repeat the harmful behavior and form unconscious patterns.

Does this remind you of anyone? When's the last time you drove over the speed limit? By death-toll standards it's one of the most dangerous crimes you can commit. How about your noncriminal harmful behavior? Think of the stories you have to tell yourself to relieve the guilt of overeating, yelling at someone you love, pretending to be nice for your boss' approval, hiding sexual desire to avoid scaring your date away, and postponing that important task yet again. You commit your crimes and then you convince yourself through lengthy justification that you had a "good" reason for doing it.

If you think this does not describe you, think again. Someone can overeat because the brain can override the body's natural understanding of food intake in order to justify food as a source of comforting emotions, and that person will then avoid clear evidence that they are harming their bodies in order to repeat the overeating. The same is true for anyone who treats people badly within the confines of the law, such as deliberately lying, and people who do not take good care of themselves. You are capable of your own version of harmful behavior, even if you don't break the law, and the harm you cause to yourself and others is only going to be repeated if you justify, minimize and avoid the truth like our criminal brothers and sisters do.

Right now, your behavior contributes directly to reduced enjoyment in your life. If you think this isn't true for you, you're either one hundred percent enlightened — and therefore probably not a real human being — or you are blinded by fear and unwilling to face it, so much so that you might as well send this book back where you got it.

The best thing I ever did was take responsibility for my life and everything in it, which is not the same as taking the blame. Thinking things are your "fault" is unhelpful and completely illogical, as it implies that you control the Universe. Alternatively, taking responsibility is about when you realize that life could get better for you, and ask yourself, "So what am I going to do about it?"

That is exactly the question I will be asking you in this book… and helping you answer.

This book is for you, for all of you. Everything from the messed up global education system, through to war, bigotry, hate and environmental destruction can, in my mind, be easily and clearly correlated to individuals suffering from confidence and authenticity issues. In a magical world where no person gave in to feelings of neediness, envy, or hatred, the problems would be few and small. But I'm not here to give a Miss World speech. I want to help you.

Every problem in your life is directly related to your level of self-confidence and your ability to behave in a way that is aligned to your core values. Why is it all on you? Because the only person who can cause you pain is you. Truly, the brain is what generates all sensations of pain, from the sickness of guilt through to the hot sharp sting of an actual knife in the belly. Your brain does that to you. No one else has that level of control. Therefore, if you want less suffering and more potential in your life, you'll need to step up and lead yourself.

This is the first of three books. In this one we will focus on the first phase of a revolutionary new principle called The 3X Model. In brief, the first phase — Exploring — is about increasing the accuracy of awareness about yourself and the outside world in an endless search for a higher level of truth. The first overarching principle of confidence and authenticity as described in the book is that you must get as close to the truth as humanly possible. By exploring carefully and with an open-mind, we allow ourselves greater understanding and higher humility so that we might learn to accept all that is.

I'm not saying that becoming confident will stop your pain completely, and in fact the process of trying to increase confidence and authenticity will require you to often choose to be more uncomfortable than you are now. You will come to see pain as something that does not have to be severe as well as being something you can accept and even grow to appreciate. This comes with the understanding that if you do not choose some small growth pain now, you will suffer later, and that type of pain is far worse.

To explain this more practically; you could choose the anxiety of applying for a new job or the regret of not having lived up to your career potential. You could choose the frustration of trying to learn something new or the guilt of a life not fully lived. You could choose the fear of being honest on a date or the loneliness of not being authentically connected to anyone. There is always pain, and you always choose. This book is about figuring out the best choice and learning how to make that decision.

As the Buddha is quoted as saying, "Life is suffering." Another way of looking at this is realizing that "life" is the constant growth experienced by an organism, and some of that growth will be painful. I believe that the action-based process of rediscovering your confidence while becoming more authentic will bring about that growth in a powerful, helpful manner.

Confidence is based on taking action to change your life. But before you take that action, you need to make a decision. That action will be entirely governed by your decision and your reasons for making it. If the decision is based in fear, insecurity and neediness, the action will often make your life less enjoyable in the long run. However, you if you learn how to make a confident, authentic and helpful decision, your actions will transform your satisfaction with life. In this book we will focus on how you think before you act.

I hope you're ready. It's time to test what I'm saying and try a different approach to living.

Chapter Two: The 3X Model

Now we're going to have a look at how your confidence can be rebuilt and rediscovered through changing the way you think, act and reflect. All of my work has been aimed at trying to figure out how to translate confidence-building into a model that can be practically applied by anyone and will suit each individual's personality and preferences. This series of books is essentially all about the process of building confidence and authenticity, a blueprint I have named The 3X Model. In this chapter we're going to look at a broad overview of the model to allow you a basic foundational understanding.

Before we even get started on this, I'd like to include a caveat. Do not expect to fully understand The 3X Model from one read of this chapter. It doesn't work that way. First, you'll understand it a little bit. Then you need to go and apply the understanding you have through real-life behavior. Then you come back and you'll understand it a little more. Over time, it will make sense as you see it play out through your actions. So don't worry if you get to the end of this chapter without fully "getting it" – you don't need to fully understand to apply it.

Vilfredo Pareto was an Italian engineer, sociologist, economist, political scientist, and philosopher, who stumbled upon a remarkable discovery. He found that in the Italian society of late 1800s, approximately eighty percent of all the financial wealth was controlled by only twenty percent of the population.

Pareto and others went on to verify that this can be replicated worldwide. He also tested this distribution in many other walks of life, finding there to be a correlative consistency in many other areas. This tendency for eighty percent of output to be controlled by twenty percent of input became a phenomenon known as the "80/20 Principle," and can now be mapped onto an almost endless list of connections. For example, you'll find you spend about eighty percent of your time at home on about twenty percent of the floor space.

How Pareto's Principle relates to this book is threefold. First, this principle can be applied directly to improving your quality of life and confidence, which we'll discuss in more detail later. Second, it suggests there are as yet not fully understood tendencies and laws in the Universe that guide processes consistently, and once they are noticed they become apparent everywhere. And third, I feel the model I'm about to share with you is as prevalent and powerful as the 80/20 concept. Like the 80/20 principle, the 3X Model can be used to explain both success and failure in almost any system.

The 3X Model came into being as I worked to synergize two separate confidence-related concepts. The first being what I call "Social Mastery," which is simply the ability to create an abundant and rewarding social life without sacrificing integrity or trying to be liked. The second is "Valued Living," a concept I learned mostly through studies of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Valued Living is all about identifying your core values and actively living by them in a psychologically flexible way. Both of these fall under the umbrella of what you might call authenticity, or authentic living.

I spent a lot of time observing people in conversation and other forms of relational interaction. As I attempted to map values onto different parts of an authentic conversation (where two people are open and honest with each other and speak without shame or fear), I noticed a pattern forming — a three-part cyclic recurrence where a meaningful "flow" of conversation naturally built up over time.

Phase One: If each person made an effort to curiously explore their version of the truth thoroughly before they spoke (which it not the same as trying to think of something good to say), they tended to put aside judgments, assumptions, neediness and fear.

Phase Two: When each person honestly expressed what they had discovered, as accurately as possible, then the message would often be well received and would naturally build deep and intimate rapport almost instantaneously.

And lastly, Phase Three: if each person respectfully took the time to allow the other respond, and in fact chose not to invest any further into the conversation or decide on their next move until after the other person had contributed to an equal level, the relative status between the two would dissolve and there would be a mutual acceptance.

It appeared that a successful interaction flowed from three core values or phases: 1. Curiosity (exploring), 2. Honesty (engaging), and 3. Respect (releasing). Hence the name The "3X" Model. The more I investigated and tested this concept, the more I understood it. There appeared a definite consistency, when following a pattern of switching between these three different values, which allowed a conversation to flow naturally as well as having the added benefit of encouraging each person to behave with integrity. Simply put, it brought out the best in them: openness, focus, compassion, connection and courage.

Importantly, it also brought out the "worst" in each person, their shame and fear, which to my surprise — and contrary to popular belief — increased the intimacy of the connection. I found quickly that shared sorrow and shame is equally as binding as shared enjoyment and success, if not more so. Think about it this way; you tend to get along well with someone who gets pissed off at the same things as you.

Alternatively, I observed that if two people had opposing values and beliefs, this 3X flow of conversation would ensure that a conflict quickly arose. This would either end the connection (eliminate the possibility of a further ongoing relationship) or serve as a platform to work through differences, saving both people a lot of time and heartache by picking up on these issues early. People could then avoid becoming attached to someone who would likely be a bad fit for them, and resentment was kept to a minimum because problems were resolved before they escalated into something that could ruin the connection.

What really got me excited was when, like Pareto, I started applying The 3X Model to other situations and areas of life. I was able to accurately describe the catalyst of any problem in a system that was not working well (such as relationships, teamwork, exercise, wealth creation, and so many more). It seemed that if someone could flow through these 3X values equally, they would gain success quickly and efficiently with measurable results. Conversely, if there was a break in the flow, if one or more of the values was overdone, neglected or missed, problems quickly arose, which caused the system to get "stuck" or break down completely. This will make more sense later when I use real-life examples to show this in action.

What we will do now is explore each of the three aspects in The 3X Model on a conceptual level and start looking at how they map to real life. This model will keep re-appearing throughout the book, and it's important to understand that the model teaches you how to use the model. By this ironic statement I mean that you will truly learn how to use this 3X model by actually trying to use it!

EXPLORE (Living by the Value of Curiosity)

It's important to note that it's arbitrary where I choose to start with this model because there is no preferential starting point when you apply it in real life. You could start with planning (curiosity), jump straight into action (honesty), or simply reflect before deciding what to do (respect).

We will start with the Explore phase of the model only because I had to choose something to start with and because this book, the first of three, will focus on the Explore phase. However, in this chapter I will also introduce the other two phases of the model to provide context and to allow you to see how Explore fits into The 3X Model.

Exploration is about quiet and unbiased discovery, a curious search for truth amongst the chaos of distraction and deception. When we Explore, we live by the value of curiosity, searching the evidence that reality has provided to our senses. We try and decide what we could do with the information in order to improve our lives and the lives of others. There is no judgment attached to reality. We simply observe it as objectively as humanly possible. We allow reality to occur to us, rather than trying to find it, create it, or shape it ourselves.

The act of breathing is how we will often describe The 3X Model as a metaphorical interpretation. Exploration therefore represents the inhalation, the consumption of resources to prepare for the exertion of effort. Breathing in is essentially applying curiosity to oxygen. Without breathing in, we cannot breathe out; without being curious, we cannot be accurately prepared to take effective honest action.

Only a few people appear to be capable of true curiosity, which is why I'll be offering many curiosity training tools in this book. Often, due to our cognitive biases, we are simply looking to prove something we think we already know, which is the opposite of curiosity. There is no open-mindedness in a biased approach. Real curiosity comes from a Socratic viewpoint; we assume we know nothing before we start observing information, which allows us to be contradicted by reality if our assumptions and biases are incorrect.

To give this a practical example, you are not really listening to someone if you believe you already know that they are thinking. Instead you are simply looking for evidence of what you assume to be correct. You will believe you can accurately predict what they are thinking, and you will attach this prediction to what they are saying, totally skewing the truth and coming out with a complete misunderstanding that you believe without question. This is not curiosity.

Thanks to self-fulfilling prophecy, you will often confuse your perception of reality by creating evidence, such as adding information in your mind to what someone is saying, and then believing that added information is factual. Only when you assume you cannot read someone's mind will you become able to pay genuine and focused attention to what they are saying or how they are behaving. The Explore phase is all about developing your ability to pay attention with as little bias as possible.

Examples of what happens in the Explore stage:

- considering options rationally
- planning your next move
- making a decision

- absorbing and considering new information (note: this is only one part of the overall concept of learning, yet we are taught in school this is learning in its entirety)
- challenging your beliefs
- examining evidence

If you want the action you take to be meaningful and more likely to generate helpful results, it must come from decisions based on an examination of reality. When you take action based on misguided beliefs and assumptions, your best laid plans eventually unravel and become ineffective. Plans based on good, rational information, the best available at any given time, will always be more effective than a whimsical plan based on assumptions, stubborn beliefs and irrational fear.

This can be seen in the difference between someone who designs a career path based on a careful exploration of their talents and passions compared with someone who chooses a job because of their fearful reaction to the possibility not having enough money. The former must engage in a long search after which they end up in a career they love and have a positive impact on the world. The latter does not have to put in as much research effort, but ends up dissatisfied, resentful and still afraid of money most of the time.

The importance of Exploration becomes obvious when it is not given the appropriate amount of your attention and energy. If you're in a conversation that escalates into conflict, the most likely reason is that you or your antagonist are not applying enough curiosity to understand each other. Having different points of view is not a conflict in itself, but irrationally taking something personally and having an agitated emotional reaction to their points of view will create conflict every time. This emotional reaction will be triggered by you assuming the other person has a harmful motive behind what they are trying to express. This assumption is almost always inaccurate, and this would be obvious if you took the time to try and empathetically understand the other person's position. This goes both ways, of course.

There is also the problem of overdoing Exploration, which is equally as unhelpful as neglecting it. Often referred to as "overthinking" and "analysis-paralysis," too much time spent in Exploration leads to an overwhelming, crippling excess of information. In my work with people who enjoy self-development, this is the most likely cause of someone feeling stuck. They keep reading books, watching videos and attending seminars, but then they fail to take action, put the information into practice, or to measure how the information has affected their lives. Further information then becomes just another hindrance to success. Thanks to clever marketing, there are people and companies who claim to help others but basically just generate information overload to keep up-selling their products.

We will go into this in much more detail throughout the book, but for now here are some real-life examples of Exploration being applied successfully:

- Before you reply, carefully and patiently considering how you feel and what you think after hearing what someone has said
- Getting advice from a personal trainer and nutritionist prior to starting a new health regime
- Comparing research from leading experts to prepare to write a book
- Figuring out which sources generate the most profit for your business before designing a marketing strategy

- Taking time to weigh up the costs and benefits objectively about a potentially life-changing decision
- Taking the time to travel the world before buying a house and settling down

You will be able to see a theme — taking the time to think and plan before taking action. Another theme that will become more clear throughout the book is not taking too much time to plan and think. You need just enough curiosity to weigh up evidence and decide on a potentially growth-supportive action, and then you must move bravely into action to test your hypothesis.

We can now also see the first indications of the spectrum from micro to macro level in the application of The 3X Model. Exploration can be as small as deciding what to say next on a phone call to as big as learning how to fly a jet. It's all relative to your overall focus, or goal, which we will dive into later in this chapter.

ENGAGE (Living by the Value of Honesty)

Once you have used curiosity to explore the truth within your mind and the external environment, the next logical step is to Engage in this truth through taking action. Another way to look at expressing your truth is that you move toward taking an action that is authentic to your values. Therefore, Engagement is always a measurable action. While you may not always be able to see the Explore phase / curiosity taking place (such as someone thinking deeply), you should always be able to see some Engaging in honesty as an expressed action.

If Exploration is breathing in, receiving the resources the world has to offer; Engagement therefore is the equally necessary act of breathing out — giving back to the world a synergy of what you have taken in.

When you express your version of the truth as honestly and accurately as possible, a number of benefits are made available for you to enjoy, dependent on the context. Expressing yourself honestly in conversation, for example, will lead you to create quality relationships with people you are strongly aligned with, while simultaneously driving away those who are a bad fit (honesty becomes a polarizing pressure that forces people to choose quickly whether they enjoy your company). Honesty encourages you to take actions that are aligned with the most accurate truth about yourself (that you are capable of discovering), causing you to do more of the things you enjoy, are skilled at, and have the motivation to continue practicing to the level of mastery.

In simple terms, honesty requires you to do what is right (courageous actions aimed at long-term lifestyle and confidence benefits) rather than what is easy (fear-based actions aimed at immediate emotional rewards and comfort).

Examples of what happens in the Engage stage:

- saying what you really think; statements and questions as well as body-language communication
- trying new things that interest you, making attempts, playing through experimentation, and testing through action
- behavior that can be measured objectively

- quitting a high-paying but soul-destroying job to immerse yourself in a career that matches your inner core values
- acts of giving with integrity

In terms of rediscovering confidence, the most important benefit you will receive through honest expression is the dissolution of shame. We will discuss the concept of shame in more detail later, but for now I'd like to point out something that many of my coaching clients have discovered.

Shame dissolves and eventually disappears completely the more often it is voluntarily exposed to the external world. Shame, in my opinion, is the single greatest barrier between a human and their potential for achievement. It disguises itself as confusion ("I don't know how to do it"), reputational risk ("It's inappropriate right now"), and danger ("It's too hard, I'll get hurt"), but in reality these excuses all represent only one thing: low self-worth.

Shame occurs when you attach the concept of wrong to something that is true about you.

Earlier, I mentioned the concept of accuracy. This factor within honesty can make all the difference and actually it's in the curiosity/exploration stage that we prepare ourselves to be as accurate as possible. During the Explore stage, as we are deciding what to say or do, we consider how accurate our supposed truth is, and after expressing this, we move into the final stage — Release — where we can reflect on this truth once more, with the benefit of hindsight as a measurement of how honest our voice or actions turned out to be. Accuracy plays a part throughout this entire model, but where most people struggle is with its link to honesty, so we'll explore it here.

As you increase accuracy, you will also increase your rewards while simultaneously reducing your costs. Accuracy eliminates harmful psychological saboteurs such as stereotyping (vague categorical assumptions), limiting beliefs, reactive emotional tantrums, and cognitive biases. Accuracy is a concept that is difficult to grasp as conjectural theory, so let's look at a realistic example to explain this more.

Imagine you and I are living together (don't worry, it's just hypothetical), and I am annoyed at you for not contributing enough to the housework. Instead of getting curious and exploring how this makes me think and feel, I just give in to my surface-level frustration and call you a "useless loser." At a high-level perspective, you could say this is my "honest" opinion.

But is it accurate?

By saying that you are useless, I am implying that you have no measurable skill or reliability at all. Now, if that was accurate, we wouldn't be having this problem, because you would not be alive. Someone who is literally without any use whatsoever would be unable to find employment, finish a meal, shower to completion, dress themselves, etc. If a person was completely useless, they would die of starvation, exposure, illness, or be killed by external forces.

So my judgment is not actually true or accurate. In a sense, it is honest because that's one way of expressing how I feel, but in comparison with objective reality, it is totally inaccurate. Therefore, it is essentially dishonest. Not only is it dishonest, we can see that by calling you a "useless loser," I have most likely damaged the relationship, and because I have given you no guidance or specific feedback, you will probably repeat the behavior that bothered me in the first place. This is a clear example of how dishonesty, or inaccurate honesty, leads to less rewards and higher costs.

You'll no doubt be able to think of many other real-life examples that follow this pattern of someone failing to identify the accurate truth before giving feedback, and how damaging this is to

relationships. I've spoken to a number of relationship coaches and counselors, and I agree with them that the most harmful behavior you can bring to a relationship of any kind is contempt, which is harmful, judgmental and inaccurate criticism.

We can see how being inaccurate takes us away from results and rewards in this example, but would being accurate take us toward them? Let's see what happens in a different scenario, where I take the time to be curious enough to find the accurate cause of my distress prior to giving you feedback. Imagine if instead of calling you a "useless loser," I said something more like this:

"Last week you didn't do your agreed share of the cleaning housework for Monday, Thursday and Saturday. I felt quite annoyed when this happened, and because I can't stand a dirty house, this created extra work for me. From now on I'd like you to match the efforts of the rest of the housemates by doing your share of the dishes and vacuuming once per week. How do you feel about that?"

Do you see how much more accurate it sounds? I'm still expressing my honesty, but now it is specific and targeted toward a single concept of behavior, whereas calling you a loser was vague and implied you have a total personality problem. I have also accepted the evidence in front of me, which is that how I feel, my reaction to your behavior, is my responsibility, and that these specific behaviors you engaged in were the only things bothering me about you. You as an entire person is in fact something impossible to give accurate and honest feedback on.

You will not always know what the accurate truth is. From a Socratic philosophical point of view, you will never know the "truth." But you can see that the closer you try to get to objective, accurate honesty, the more you are rewarded in the long term. Dishonest expression through actions, such as pretending you agree with someone or staying with a job you hate, only ever brings short-term rewards, which are then offset by long-term punishments. You might stick with your unsatisfying job for the money, yet years down the track, you end up hating your entire life and losing your partner because of stress-related mood swings. As always, when using The 3X Model, we see that a short-term reward is often simply a disguise for an inevitable and devastating punishment later on.

To avoid getting stuck in over-thinking, you must at some point make a decision and act on it; you must Engage the decision. This is helped by understanding that you cannot know the accurate truth until after action is taken. The Engage phase is basically an experiment, a hands-on learning activity that tests what you think is true. You may not know the absolute truth of how you think and feel, but you can express what you do know as a test of the information you have available. Thinking about it more after a decision is made will only tell you what you already know, it cannot improve your wisdom.

This relieves the pressure most of us feel of being emotionally attached to outcomes. The reason we get stressed is because we see most action as a final commitment, one last do-or-die attempt. Once you start to see all action as merely another test, just more practice, which you will measure the results of in the Release phase, the issue caused by the toxic desire to get results starts to dissolve. For example, rather than trying to "get my dream job," you are merely "practicing how to do job interviews," a change of frame that relieves the pressure of success and transforms it into curiosity.

As with the other phases of The 3X Model, problems arise when you overdo or neglect the Engage phase too.

You'll know that you are spending too much time and energy in the Engage phase when you're going hard but results are not improving over time. Constant action feels busy; therefore, it can create an

illusion of progress. However, if you are not putting equal effort into learning new things (Explore) as well as measuring the efficacy of your actions (Release), you are doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again — popularly known as Albert Einstein's definition of insanity.

In simple terms, if you are doing lots of stuff and not seeing better results, you are probably overdoing the Engage phase, giving it more than a third of your time, energy and focus. Counterintuitively, when you feel like you are busy but still "need" to do more, you probably actually need to be doing a lot less.

Lack of improvement can also be a symptom of neglecting the Engage phase, because without taking honest and accurate action, you cannot create results. There is a myth you might believe, something about how results will just happen to you if you're patient. Dangerous clichés such as "good things come to those who wait" get thrown around by people who haven't tested them properly to see if they are accurate. As discussed earlier, sitting around thinking and planning without taking action does not actually do anything in terms of bringing rewards into your life. Law of Attraction is total bullshit.

Without action, thinking is useless.

The difference between neglecting versus overdoing the Engage phase is that at least when you're overdoing it there is something to measure. Stop and look at the area you're focusing on. What actions, attempts and experiments have you taken that you can measure? If the answer is "very few or none," you know the issue is lack of Engagement, whereas if there is plenty going on but no results, there's too much Engagement.

Here are some examples of the Engage phase being successfully applied:

- Matching every hour of planning or thinking time with three hours of action, before stopping to reflect or make new plans
- Making a statement that matches the intimacy and investment levels of what the person you're talking to has said
- Trying something new to see if you like it, such as attending a dance class
- Calling your first potential client as a way of honestly expressing an interest in starting a business
- Doing a workout at the gym to see if the program you read about online feels right for you

Again we can see the different levels at which this can be applied. Expressing yourself can be as small and simple as speaking your mind to a friend, or as epic and life-changing as taking the action that starts a business. What we also see is that the macro level is still only ever going to be a micro-level action when you Engage in it. "Starting a business" is not a single massive action, it's a combination of tiny actions, just like anything else. No single action really matters that much in the bigger scheme of things, but without small actions nothing at all will change! As Arnold Schwarzenegger is known for saying "Missing one workout won't make you small, but doing one workout won't make you big".

RELEASE (Living by the Value of Respect)

In my work with clients, indeed in my conversations with anyone who has a recurring problem, the most likely cause of their issues is a lack of reflection (followed closely by overthinking). A lack of reflection is when someone does not create the space to measure results, to rest and heal, and to reflect on the information available to them. The Release phase describes this often neglected but equally crucial part of The 3X Model.

When we pause after letting out a breath, our body prepares to absorb the next inhalation; in a sense this is the eye of the storm. Most people get trapped in a thought-to-action sequence, as even highly reputable self-development resources are often based on just planning and taking action without adequate time and energy going into the space between action and thought. Release is the silence amongst the noise.

We use the value of Respect to guide this part of the model because it conveniently describes the state of mind where space occurs. Respect for yourself is when you allow yourself to rest, when you accept who you are and your circumstances, and when you encourage the Universe to invest equally toward your goals. (Note: this is not a reference to the Law of Attraction, which I believe is unscientific money-stealing rubbish, but instead a space of time created to allow environmental factors to react to you.) Respect for others is when you give them the time to think and react to what you have said or done, and respect for the world is where you sit back and allow reality to provide you with evidence to work with.

Examples of the Release phase in action:

- going silent during a conversation after making a statement
- vacations and other forms of time off
- writing in a journal and other forms of active reflection
- meditation
- receiving something without judgment, particularly feedback, from someone else
- measuring results
- taking time out to contemplate your situation after feeling an emotional reaction
- resting your body and mind
- switching to a new activity to take a break from the original activity (such as going for a walk after writing for two hours… see ya later!)
- allowing yourself to experience growth-pain

Let's talk about that last point because I believe pain is the reason the Release phase is so neglected by most people. When we stop what we are doing and allow ourselves to absorb the feedback the Universe is giving us, we put ourselves at risk of experiencing pain. This is something we are taught to avoid, yet have you ever really stopped to consider (reflect on) why we think pain is bad?

How does a child learn about gravity? Is it through textbooks, stories from her parents, or dropping things to see if they hit the ground? No. She learns about gravity when she falls out of a tree and breaks her arm — no other lesson hits home harder. Her curiosity led her to want to climb the tree, her honesty led her to boldly climb, and eventually she exceeded her skill limit, causing her to fall.

And as she sits in the Release phase, giving respect to the pain in her arm, she learns what gravity does to a falling mass more clearly than any textbook could have hoped to teach.

Children are often completely at peace with the concept of pain until we start to teach them it is wrong and must be avoided. A child will hurt themselves considerably, and the parent who allows this to happen to a helpful degree will ensure that the child grows up with an experimental approach to learning, which is far more productive than uncurious information absorption (e.g., school) or blind unquestioning action (e.g., employment).

When you do not take time to create a reflective space, you build up the pain in the background. Take the person who is in a conflicted and unfit personal relationship. They are so committed to the future fiction of a happy relationship they refuse to stop and honestly measure what is happening, ignoring all the clearly obvious signs that the relationship doesn't work. They get stuck bouncing back and forth between Explore and Engage, constantly looking for new ways to make it work, but never stopping long enough to ask What does the evidence show me? Even a brief glance at a relationship that has not worked for years is all you need to see your efforts are unhelpful.

When you avoid reflecting for too long, the pain builds to an almost unmanageable level, and all along you could have been voluntarily accepting pain in smaller, tolerable, and more helpful doses.

This raises a cognitive bias known as Sunk Cost Fallacy, what I call the fear of wrongful investment. When you get stuck in a loop between Explore and Engage without Releasing, you will feel like you are making progress because there's lots of thinking and plenty of action. In fact, it feels like such a massive effort you will start to assume that it must produce results eventually, through sheer force of will. You expect a return on your investment, even though there is no evidence to suggest you're receiving any. Due to your neglect of consistent and equal attention to the Release phase, you lose track of what works and what doesn't, leaving yourself doomed to repeat and exacerbate the same old mistakes.

The longer you do this, the more resistance you'll feel toward the idea of stopping and measuring results. Deep down we are all scared we will find proof that our efforts did not produce results. Little do we realize that if we had taken regular time-outs to process our results, we would have made much better-informed decisions, taken more effective action, and therefore had a much safer investment!

It is never too late to stop and reflect.

On a personal note, I was stunned by the changes that occurred in my life when I started to live more by the value of respect and bring Release into my life, particularly when I eventually increased its status to match Explore and Engage. I'm a born action-taker and over-thinker, which means I was always busy but not feeling like I was making real progress. Then I made an active decision to do two new things — welcome the concept of growth through pain and allow myself time to rest. Once I started experimenting with these two concepts, I also began to see that they were really about receiving feedback and then healing from the effect the feedback had on me.

Respect should not be confused with curiosity, yet it appears they often are. People believe that if they are constantly thinking about what to do next, they are reflecting, but this is not the case. Release is an open space, a blank slate, an empty cup, where you allow yourself to see, hear and feel what the Universe has to say. For example, in a conversation, curiosity is when you think of what to honestly say next, but before this can happen you must wait for the other person to contribute. You

create a silent space, and only once you've fully absorbed what they've said or done in that space can you decide on what to say or do next.

Examples of successful applications of the Release phase:

- for every two hours' work, taking a one-hour break to allow your mind to catch up
- listening to what someone has to say without judgment and waiting until they are completely finished before deciding what you will say next
- taking three days off training after stressing a particular muscle group, or switching to an alternative muscle group to allow for this gap between workouts for each group
- taking thirty minutes each day to write about what took place, to observe without trying to understand it, just purely downloading your thoughts
- waiting for someone to invest equal time, energy and money into a partnership, to match what you have invested, before going any further with them
- going for a walk in the morning to allow ideas to occur to you (one of my favorites)
- spending one day apart from your partner every week without any contact whatsoever to allow you both to assess how things are going

You can apply the Release phase at the micro level, such as going silent during a conversation, and of course at the macro level, such as taking two months off work every year. The key to emphasize here is that Release gets equal attention, time and energy as the other two phases. This will feel wrong at first, as you have likely been trained to feel guilty when you take a break. Do some research into the most successful people. You'll often find that their biggest gains came after choosing to do less.

FOCUS

As you start applying equal energy to each phase of The 3X Model, the flow will begin to build. The 3X Model follows the laws of centrifugal force, which means if all parts are equally balanced, it will spin evenly and easily build up speed (efficacy and efficiency). If one or more of the parts are unequally weighted, the increase in speed will eventually lead to dramatic imbalance, and it's only a matter of time before it destabilizes completely and falls apart.

When balanced flow is achieved, interesting events start to happen, also known as results. Desirable outcomes, as well as unexpected benefits, will start to occur. It is worth noting that outcomes and results include getting proof that something does not work or is not worth the effort. But before we can hope to achieve balance and gain helpful results, we first need to understanding why we are spinning the wheel in the first place. What is the focus of this effort, and what are we flowing toward?

With the core 3X Model at its highest level, in its purest form you might say, we have the three key values of curiosity, honesty and respect spinning around a central focus of authenticity. When you apply equal measures of curiosity, honesty and respect, you will create a situation that is authentic to whatever YOU actually are. When you give equal attention to considering new information, testing it through action, and reflecting on the outcomes, you will generate the results that suit you the best.

For The 3X Model to be effective, you need to ensure that the Focus in the center is based on your authentic self. But what is this esoteric concept of authentic self? The word authenticity has become a buzzword in the new millennium and ruined by marketing idiots trying to scavenge money from self-development fans.

The good news is you don't need to know what your authentic self is! The 3X Model will help you figure it out. Using The 3X Model will cause you to live authentically while simultaneously developing your understanding of what authenticity is for you. Rather than trying to figure out what the "right" focus is, you can guess and choose an arbitrary starting point. You then allow The 3X Model to give you the feedback you need to assess the accuracy of your guess.

To make this more understandable, imagine you are using The 3X Model to improve your career. In the middle of the model you put the word Money, as a representation of the focus for your career. Now you can't be sure that pursuing money is authentic for you, but by giving it a go and allowing The 3X Model to give equality to curiosity, honesty and respect, you will quickly find out. As you go about pursuing money, you may notice that your satisfaction is not increasing and you're finding it harder and harder to keep the wheel spinning.

You then use The 3X Model to explore, test and reflect on other reasons to drive your career, and perhaps you discover that the real reason you want money is because you want to feel freedom. You then change the focus to Freedom and this changes your decisions, your actions, and therefore the outcomes. All of a sudden the wheel starts spinning effortlessly while providing rewards. You have now discovered that freedom is authentic to you, while money was simply a distraction.

I use this example because I see it so often. People mistake money as the focus or end goal when in reality it is simply one of many available resources that can be used to pursue an authentic life. It's the same as using Marriage for the focus in the relationship sphere when in fact Love is the true value-based outcome you are pursuing. Marriage becomes a distraction that steers you away from a more direct and effective path to what you actually want deep down inside. This would be the same as putting Religion as the focus on your spiritual journey when what you actually want is Peace or Understanding.

To aid you in determining your focus, keep asking yourself, "Why do I want this?" and, "How will this change me?" until you can answer it no more. This occurs when you reach the deepest and most authentic reasoning you are currently capable of finding (and yes, there are always deeper levels to discover).

Check out this example of a coaching conversation where I explored one of my client's focus points.

Me: "What do you want?"

Client: "Mmm… I think in the end I just want a girlfriend."

Me: "OK, so why do you want a girlfriend?"

Client: "Wow, I dunno… I guess because then I'll be happy."

Me: "Cool, well it sounds to me like what you really want is what you call "happiness." Tell me, how does having a girlfriend relate to happiness?"

Client: "It would just be really nice to come home to someone I could talk to, you know, openly and honestly. Someone who supports me and gives me a reason to be excited about life in general, I guess. If you've got a great girlfriend, everything just feels better."

Me: "If I'm hearing you right, what you're saying is that happiness comes from being able to express yourself openly and honestly, feeling supported, and being excited about life…"

Client: "Yeah… pretty much."

Me: "Let me just check in with you here. Are you saying it's not possible to experience open honesty, support and excitement without having a girlfriend?"

Client: "Well, of course you don't need a girlfriend for that stuff."

Me: "Go on…"

Client: "Umm… well in the end those are all just internal feelings… I guess I'm in control of those. But I don't know how to feel that way without having a girlfriend."

Me: "Perhaps. Or perhaps you've used your energy to pursue getting a girlfriend rather than directly pursuing the internal rewards of openness, honesty, support and excitement. Let's try something here: imagine a world without women. What would it look like if you were to try and bring these things into your life in that world?"

Client: "Well, I could learn how to be honest with myself, exploring my mind and things like that. And actually the support thing is something that I shouldn't need someone else for. My previous relationships were based on holding each other up, and that shit never works!"

Me: "And what about excitement?"

Client: "I would have to find some hobbies or something, put some real effort into figuring what my purpose is. Huh… I see what you're trying to say. I suppose technically I could get those things without needing a girl. I've never really thought about that before."

Me: "I'm not saying one way or the other. I guess what I'm asking you is which is more helpful: trying to get a girlfriend who might bring you happiness, or directly pursuing those factors of happiness – openness, honesty, support and excitement – itself?"

Client: "Happiness."

You see in this conversation that we dug until we not only got to the core of what my client actually wanted out of life — his definition of happiness — but we also opened up the possibility that there were other ways to create happiness besides the one and only method he was aware of. When you are trying to figure out what your focus is, it can be helpful to try and remove reliance on any other person or situation. Try to focus on what is directly under your control — your behavior.

To help you get started, here are some potential focus points that I have found effective in achieving goals:

- Have a goal of increasing money for building a business? Focus on creating relationships.
- Have a goal of improving fitness and diet for health? Focus on increasing energy.
- Have a goal of finding love? Focus on creating honest connections.
- Have a goal of creating a more interesting lifestyle? Focus on trying new things.
- Have a goal of building up self-confidence? Focus on choosing discomfort.

FUEL AND RESOURCES

The Universe runs on a very basic system — energy in equals energy out. For you to have energy to create the 3X flow, you'll need to supply yourself with the most appropriate and effective fuel sources you can find. The upside to having a misguided focus, like money, is that you may have instead identified a good source of fuel.

It's important that you see fuel as an expendable resource to be burned for energy, rather than an end goal. That's the difference between, say, money and a girlfriend; you can burn money to achieve contentment while living by your values, but burning a girl for the same reason is a massive step away from the value of respect. Whenever you create distance between your actions and your values, you imbalance the 3X wheel. It's only a matter of time before you pay a price. This will be known throughout the book as the authenticity gap — a measurable distance between who you are (your current behavior) and who you wish you were (a person living by your values).

In the Explore phase, you can hypothesize which fuels are the best source of energy for your goals. In the Engage phase, you can split-test and otherwise experiment with the different fuel ideas you came up with. And finally, in the Release phase, you can try to accurately measure the energy efficiency of those fuel sources to help you decide whether you should change or stay the same. Again, here we see the model being used to help learn to use the model!

Following are some examples of what I consider to be fuel. Note how many of these are commonly perceived to be results rather than being seen as a fuel source for burning. You'll often be told that you should be stockpiling these things rather than using them to live by your values:

- Money (ideal for values like adventure or determination)
- Time – required for all values. Choosing how to expend time wisely is much more effective than trying to save time.
- Physical energy and stamina – if you run out of these you can't take action, so exercise and training is crucial to increase this fuel source.
- Food and water – duh! Of course, what type of food and liquid you put in your body will affect how much fuel you're provided with.
- Sunlight and outdoor exposure – critical for managing mood.

There are certain things that are mistaken for fuel when actually they are not resources you should burn if you want to live by your values. These include people, opportunities to experience something new, relaxation time, hobbies, and sleep. People often sacrifice these things to build up more time or other fuel sources, but in doing so they sacrifice living by their values too.

It becomes important to carefully examine where you are burning much-needed fuel in other less important areas of your life as well. If you are blowing money on shoes, you are causing harm to the goals that benefit from financial investment. If you are spending lots of time in front of the television, you are depriving yourself of time available to other areas of your life. If you don't eat a healthy diet, you are robbing yourself of physical energy to complete other tasks.

Quite often I see my clients failing in one area without any awareness that they have robbed that area of resources to use elsewhere. One client I had said he kept feeling his confidence fluctuate. When we explored it, we found this coincided with days where he skipped going to the gym. For me, I get stressed more easily if I don't follow through on my morning routine because I lose the ability

to focus as carefully when don't I stretch and meditate before a big day. Sacrificing my morning routine to save time just leaves me slower and less efficient, therefore losing both time and enjoyment.

We often compartmentalize the areas of our life — particularly the harmful belief that the mind and body are separate entities — and therefore overlook the links that lead to failure. Everything you do affects everything else you do, so the more value points you can rack up in any part of your life has benefits all round, and likewise, dropping the ball with values in one area harms the others.

IMPORTANT NOTE…

As I mentioned earlier, do not expect to suddenly understand The 3X Model fully and be able to remember all the different parts or special words. That will come with time and practice. Instead, focus more on using your values to guide your decision making. Ask yourself questions constantly, like What would it mean to be curious right now? in order to allow your natural value system to send suggestions into your conscious awareness.

If you get too caught up in working the model, doing it "right," you might get locked into an outcome-dependent trap, which will simply lead to more overthinking (covered more in the next chapter). You can keep revisiting this chapter as you test and experiment with different approaches to living by your values. Each time you re-read it, you'll find it makes more sense and seems less wordy.

Chapter Three: When Things Get Sticky

“I feel stuck!”

This is the number one reason people seek me out for coaching. Even the most effective and productive people in the world still have at least one area in their life where they feel a lack of flow and progress. This still happens to me regularly! Often, they describe this as hitting a wall or an invisible ceiling where they do not see themselves as making any significant progress. This frustration is aggravated by the suspicion that other people — who appear to have no obvious advantage — are flowing along easily.

Using The 3X Model, we can describe every problem in your life through simply identifying why you’ve stopped moving through the cycle. The progress of any system in your life, be it social, career, health, or any other, is dependent on a consistent flowing change between the three phases of the model: explore, engage and release. Getting “stuck” generally describes what happens when one phase of the model has been either neglected or overdone, leading you to either stay in a single phase or bounce between two phases of the model without completing a full cycle. Success comes from flow; problems come from stickiness.

Getting stuck is a crucial part of learning how to use The 3X Model effectively! I would like to invite you to start accepting the concept of being stuck and seeing it for the helpful learning and wisdom-growing experience it really is. Just because it’s unpleasant, frustrating and somewhat painful does not necessarily mean it’s unhelpful. The good news is that by getting stuck, and then learning how to get unstuck, you will eventually master your ability to problem-solve universally. I’d rather learn martial arts from a black belt who has lost 1,000 fights in real life, than a black belt who has only experienced mock fights. Learning to become unstuck is a transferable skillset, which can be applied to new or unfamiliar situations because the core process of getting unstuck works the same across different contexts.

A great example of this transference of skill happened to me recently. I had been suffering from my emotional attachment to money. Once, in a single morning, I went from ecstatic to depressed, all because I got a big payout and then found out about an unknown debt, within hours of each other. So I decided to tackle my stickiness around money through exploring my irrational attachment to financial outcomes.

Months later, when I finally made some progress with the money issue, I found that my fear of abandonment — and how that was affecting my relationship with my girlfriend — suddenly became easier to deal with. It turned out that dealing with my insecurity with money was transferable to dealing with my insecurity about relationships. Getting stuck with money had delivered unexpected wisdom in another crucial area of my life. Why? Because getting stuck is universal; the situation may change but the fear, ignorance and insecurity that created the stickiness came from the same subconscious place.

SHAMELESSNESS

Through learning how to become unstuck, you will also begin healing an important area of your life, something that is almost certain to be somewhat toxic for you at this time — your emotional shame. One of the deepest tragedies about the human race is the way we teach our children to be ashamed

of normal, natural human thoughts, emotions and experiences. What compounds this tragedy is our almost complete lack of awareness that this is taking place.

When I was a manager at Corrections, I suffered from Imposter Syndrome, an unofficial condition where someone in a position of influence feels they are unqualified to lead and must hide their fraudulence. My emotional shame in this situation was around stress. I was extremely stressed and even burned out, due to not dealing with the vicarious trauma of rehabilitating pedophiles for so many years. I had grey bags under my eyes, would snap at the slightest provocation, and could not focus on my work for more than a few minutes. All I had to do was ask someone to give me a hand so that I could take time out to talk to a counselor. But I didn't do it because I thought it was "wrong" and unprofessional to show stress. This is emotional shame in action.

We are taught as we grow up to hide emotional states like anger, confusion, stress and fear. It is ingrained into us, by the brainwashed adults who influenced us during our upbringing, to believe only a small, select number of emotions are acceptable, like happiness and calmness, while other emotions are evidence of failure as a human. Getting stuck is often the result of our inability to access our natural emotional states to use the helpful information and power they provide.

Think about it. Without anger, there is no passion or courage. Without sadness, there is no gratitude or reflection. Without stress, there is no motivation to improve. We need all of our emotions to make healthy and helpful decisions, and yet we've been taught to suppress all but a few. No wonder we struggle! It's like trying to do a long jump without a run-up. There's no power, no emotional momentum to carry us forward. In the Explore phase of the model, the focus of this first book in the trilogy, we will need to identify what emotional state we're in and consider how to exploit it to our advantage.

I had a client who was deeply shameful about anger. Whenever he experienced anger, it would trigger an automatic cognitive pattern whereby he would try to avoid the physiological feelings that anger created and justify the need to repress it. He was taught as a child that anger represented a dangerous and pathetic lack of self-control. So I asked him a hypothetical question to spark a thought-experiment:

"If you were God, and you created humans, why would you give them the emotion of anger?"

Interestingly, in spite of his shame around anger, he was immediately able to articulate the benefits of having the ability to generate anger. He spoke of dictators, people who suppressed and abused others, and how anger allowed the common people to gain the courage to rise up and act in their own defense, ensuring the survival of the species. Anger, he said, is a motivational tool that can break someone out of an unhelpful pattern and overcome fear.

And that is where we are going with all of this! We are going to use The 3X Model to deal with the issue of being emotionally stuck. We are going to explore the helpful emotional states of anger, confusion, sadness and others, to show you how these can be used to measure where you are stuck, why you are stuck, and most importantly, what you can do to get unstuck.

I really want you to open your mind here. You may possess the belief that some emotions are wrong. Even strongly validated psychological research and theories, many of which are listed in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), will label normal human emotions as symptoms of a problem. I want you to consider the possibility that we are all viewing painful emotional states inaccurately. An emotional sensation like anger or sadness may feel unpleasant to experience, but this is not evidence that the emotion is problematic or unhelpful. In my opinion, the

real problems only begin when you start to fight against the emotion, due to pain or shame, instead of figuring out a helpful way to utilize it.

Continuing with what I said before, without anger, you cannot experience motivation or courage. Anger can be used as both a tool to indicate what is important and as the fuel needed to override fear. You can only appreciate life and reflect if you are able to access different levels of sadness (try journaling when you're excited versus when you are sad). Without confusion, you lack the enthusiasm for curiosity. Without stress you would have no idea which part of you needs time to rest and heal.

I want you to consider, if only for a few minutes, the possibility that all emotions are helpful… if you know how to use them to guide your decision making. Now, let's start looking at practical examples of how emotional shame links with being stuck.

THE INFORMATION TRAP

The most common problem I see people suffer from when they first consciously get involved with self-development is the trap of too much information. This is where someone absorbs copious amounts of information passively and then becomes overwhelmed and frustrated by it. They become overwhelmed because there is too much conflicting information to decide how to actually move forward, and they feel frustrated because despite "learning" all this great stuff their lives do not seem to have measurably improved.

What we are seeing here is the problem caused by overdoing – getting stuck in – the Explore phase of The 3X Model. This is the problem of too much curiosity. You create this problem when you passively absorb new information, such as reading books, watching videos, attending seminars or any non-practical workshop that does not support real-life application, for too long without taking action. Then, instead of testing, experimenting and putting this new information to the test, you simply reflect on it. You fluctuate between Explore (think) and Release (reflect), without visiting the Engage (action) stage in between. Simply put, you are stuck in thought and not taking action.

It's a deceptive trap because you will feel like you are making progress. You have new information in your head, and perhaps you've shared it with others who agree with the new information, so you assume that you must have changed. You think differently, therefore you must now be different, right? Nope!

Put it this way; you're now into chapter three of this book. Have you significantly changed your behavior yet? Have you tried something different? If not, either this book is not resonating with you, or you are stuck in Exploring what I've written without doing anything about it. Put the book down and go take a new action right now. It doesn't matter if it's the right thing to do, just do something to test the new ideas in your head.

Because you have different thoughts while you absorb material, you start to believe that something has actually changed in your life. This is where journaling becomes important. You need to see that the problems and lack of satisfaction in your life don't just go away through thinking about them. Insights that change your beliefs are definitely helpful and often inspire change, but without life-changing action, the impact of such mental breakthroughs will eventually fade. You'll return to the way you were before. Your brain is actively working against significant belief shifts through a process called confirmation bias, and if it doesn't see lots of new evidence, which can only be created through taking new actions, it will begin to discard any new ideas and return to its original settings.

Take the money example I mentioned before. Some years ago I read a great book called The Richest Man in Babylon by George Samuel Clason. This book contains some tried and true methods for establishing financial security. However, at the time I first read it, I was abundant in money and didn't see the need to engage in any new money-management strategies. At the time of reading the book I remember thinking, "Of course! It's so obvious!" many times over. Yet because I never tested or implemented it, I eventually returned to an unhelpful pattern of overspending. Later, the start-up of my business was nowhere near as successful as its potential because I spent money poorly. I could still remember clearly the principles in the book, but some crucial part of my brain was not on board with them. Had I tested the ideas as soon as I learned them, I might have ingrained them more helpfully and applied them when it mattered.

Knowing something helpful is not wisdom; you must actively be living by it.

For every individual, the reaction to any problem will be different, so it's impossible for me to say exactly what to look out for in terms of how and why you're stuck. You can figure out your own symptoms to indicate you've had too much passive learning, and you can begin to establish your own possible solutions for overthinking.

Try this. Think of time when you learned a lot but didn't do anything with the information (i.e., did not test it actively), and ultimately no results came of it. How did this make you feel? What thoughts did you notice happening? What behavior patterns do you notice? Which physical sensations gave you an indication that you were getting stuck in overthinking?

As a guide, I can talk about what I commonly see in my clients when this problem arises. First, the most common emotional reactions are disappointment and frustration — the tense, hot, rushing feelings that come with thoughts of hopelessness, powerlessness and a sense of unfairness. "I have learned so much. Why aren't things getting better?"

Now we can observe the process of shame being attached to a normal and helpful human emotion. Odds are, you have been taught that feeling frustrated is some form of failure. You have "lost" if you become frustrated and somehow you are expected to achieve a life where frustration never happens. The trigger for shame fires off shortly after you first start getting frustrated, which is your brain's helpful way of warning you that you need to take action, but you punish yourself for having that experience instead of listening to the message.

My first memorable experience of this was when I was trying to develop my social skills and confidence, unfortunately through the manipulative and unhealthy school of Pick Up Artistry (PUA). For those of you who haven't heard of it, PUA is a range of different social manipulation strategies where you use psychological tactics and deception to influence women into being attracted to you.

I got so excited about potentially ending my feelings of loneliness that I grabbed every book and video I could find on the subject. I spent hours absorbing and reviewing this material, and my excitement grew as I felt the information building up in my mind. I felt like I was getting it. I had fantasies of mastery with women and felt like I understood women better than they understood themselves.

Wow, that is tough to read after I've written it – such arrogance!

That sense of superior wisdom dissipated completely when I finally went out to try it. The first time I wanted to "approach" a woman and test some of this exciting new information, I froze up completely. The weight of all of those hours of study, the sheer mass of information, drowned me in a sea of thoughts, ideas, doubts, what ifs and hesitation. There were simply too many things to try.

In my mind it felt like a hundred people trying to get through a single doorway at the same time. The frustration and guilt I later felt from taking no action was enormous.

I finally made a breakthrough when I decided to choose just one thing and test it out. Instead of trying to become a master-manipulator right out of the gate, I arbitrarily picked one conversation-starter (known as an "opener") and tried it out. Then another, and another, and then some different tactics, one at a time until I start building up a repertoire of needy tricks.

In testing these through taking real action, I started to realize that something felt wrong about it. I had to see the evidence, the real-life reactions of women, before I could realize that manipulating others into liking me was no different than how I'd been my whole life as an approval-seeking Mr Nice Guy. Surprisingly, women responding positively upset me the most in the long run. I felt like some sort of evil con man rapist. Through this experience, I discovered that sitting there, reading and watching videos missed a crucial element of wisdom — how it felt to actually put it into action.

So, let's redefine frustration as simply your body's natural warning sign that you might be overthinking and need to take action! If you feel bothered by the lack of results, like you have been sitting around waiting for something to happen and it just hasn't, you can almost be certain that you are simply not doing enough. There may also be a sense of helpless confusion, or procrastination, disguised as "where the hell do I start?" which comes from having too many options.

Freedom does not come from having an abundance of options, it actually comes from restricting your options to a single choice.

Frustration does not only mean not enough action. It can occur at any stage of The 3X Model. You can also become frustrated from taking lots of action without seeing results, which indicates you need more time to rest and reflect. But when you feel frustrated and you see a pattern of passive (non-active) learning, it's probably a good sign that you are stuck in the Explore phase and need to get moving.

The secret to breaking free of this is to take any action you can think of. Rather than trying to take the perfect or best action, just randomly select a small idea and put it to the test in a physical way. It genuinely does not matter what you do — you could pull an activity out of hat — because you will finally be cranking up the 3X flow, which will eventually resolve the main issue over time. Once you've taken the action, you'll be able to stop and reflect on it, creating a full transition from Explore to Engage to Release, heading back to start again at Explore. Go and do something different right now. Anything.

ANALYSIS-PARALYSIS: LETTING GO OF THE "FINAL RESULT"

I believe that analysis-paralysis is primarily created and programmed into us by the current education system, where we are taught that every attempt must end in a perfect result, and that we should be judged against standards of perfection. We become afraid of taking action, of even just getting started, because we don't yet feel ready to deliver a perfect outcome. Well of course you don't! If you haven't experimented or practiced yet, how on Earth can you be expected to deliver anything more than a random, novice attempt?

You don't see toddlers and babies worrying about delivering a perfect result. They simply explore, test, observe results, and then repeat the process, completely unaware they are accurately adhering to scientific method and The 3X Model. In their simplicity, they know instinctually that you have to

experiment to make progress and there is always more progress to be made. They don't worry about standing up perfectly on the first attempt. They simply try to stand a little bit more each day. They curiously explore standing with an open mind.

Once you come to understand that there is never going to be a final result, that in fact every action you take is merely another test or another bit of practice in the never-ending growth process, the pressure to achieve or win will be greatly reduced.

In my life, this became really apparent when I started dancing competitively. While I was backstage, I noticed the obvious fact that we'd all be far more nervous before a competitive performance than we ever were just practicing or dancing for fun. It seems unquestionable that this should be the case, of course, but that's the very problem. We don't think to question something because everyone is doing it. After some time spent backstage at competitions, it slowly dawned on me that maybe I had been conditioned to believe I should be nervous in certain contexts, without a good reason why.

Why did we get nervous? Because we had become attached to the idea of delivering a flawless execution — a final result, you might say. To this day I still regularly see dancers coming off stage swearing and crying about tiny mistakes in their performance. A few experiences of this led to me being hit by a shocking realization — they didn't even get to enjoy it! They weren't even able to reap the reward of satisfaction from the very thing they had trained for, injured themselves for, and sometimes even broken themselves for.

I started to question how this could be changed. How could someone perform at the highest level in their field and enjoy it? I knew the answer lay with the concept of the finality of a performance — the idea that you only get one shot to be great had to be challenged. That's when I stepped back and realized that even an Olympic-level performance is still just practice. Even when I was competing, I was simply practicing how to compete and testing different competition strategies. The whole thing was just one more experiment, something I could learn and grow from… but only if I enjoyed it.

Enjoyment is the feeling you can only get when you are fully present and accepting of the present moment – it is the absence of analysis-paralysis. It's that moment where you bathe in the glory of just being alive. Oddly enough, it's probably also the best possible cognitive state to be in if you want to learn and develop. Often, the key to enjoying anything comes from releasing the pressure to achieve an outcome. One way to release that pressure is to reframe the situation from being a "performance" to simply "just another practice." You can still put in your best effort without needing to try and win.

Think of the things you enjoy most. I bet many of those things come with an understanding that there is no need to impress anyone, win anything, or achieve highly. If they're challenging, it's the challenge you find enjoyable rather than the final outcome. Or perhaps you are unable to enjoy something without an outcome. So my question to you is why not?

Before you freak out about taking that seemingly important "final" action, ask yourself, "What am I testing right now?" Learn to treat every action as simply an experiment. There is never a final outcome, and as long as you remain alive, there will always be another chance to test, perform and practice.

ONE LAST NOTE

Another common curiosity trap is what Lifestyle Entrepreneur Press founder, and publisher of this book Jesse Krieger calls “SOS” (Shiny Object Syndrome). He puts it better than I can, so check out the article here:

http://lifestyleentrepreneurblog.com/the-cure-for-shiny-object-syndrome/

Chapter Four: Cleaning up Horseshit

Who do you wish you were right now?

The Explore phase of The 3X Model is basically all about answering this one question. Everything in this book is going to be derived from and connected to a central hypothesis. Deep down you know who you are supposed to be and how you should behave.

As supercoach Michael Neill once said, “We are all diamonds, covered in horseshit, coated in nail polish.”

We started out right when we were children, but then the adults and peers in society piled their fears, insecurities and limiting beliefs on top of our authentic selves, confusing and hiding our true values from our conscious awareness. The authentic diamond you once were has been covered in horseshit, and since then you’ve done your best to make it look good to both yourself and others.

After a while you came to accept this distorted view of who you are and mistook it as the person you are supposed to be. This means you are filled with dread each time you dislike something true you see in yourself. Your solution to this dilemma, as part of the brain’s natural process for removing guilt, is to attempt to make the mutated understanding of yourself palatable. Basically, in your own mind, you try to make yourself look good. Don’t worry, we all do it.

In simple terms, over time we come to observe just how constantly afraid we are, and we feel ashamed of this. Sometimes the fear is too shameful to even consciously acknowledge, so instead we just get sensations of frustration, pressure and powerlessness. You become a victim of the persona you were conditioned to become and out of a desperate need to be significant you cling to your identity as if you would drown without it.

As I’ve often spoken about before, the identity I used to cling to was being The Nice Guy. The fears that influenced and controlled my entire life were based on a misunderstanding of social acceptance. Society had raised me to believe that having someone dislike me or disapprove of me was a bad thing — something to be ashamed of. This is the “horseshit” that got piled on top of my intuitive childhood confidence, and it overshadowed more helpful beliefs I was born knowing, like “making mistakes is how we learn” and “if someone doesn’t like you for who you are, find someone else to hang out with.”

Deep down I knew something was wrong because I could see evidence everywhere of people not being “nice” and yet getting the things in life I craved. As the weight of the guilt became unbearable, my mind went into overdrive to rationalize being controlled by fear the way I was. My mind convinced me/itself that being a Nice Guy was something to be proud of, and assertive people were jerks. People who took care of themselves were selfish and people who had fun were lazy. I applied a nail polish veneer to my shame to make it look good, which trapped me into a high-pressure pattern of constantly fighting to maintain my Nice Guy identity while simultaneously hating myself for it.

Which identity have you unhelpfully applied to yourself?

GUILT

Guilt can be your friend. Guilt can be the single most recognizable warning sign that you are stepping away from authenticity. It can guide you toward living by your values and steer you away from fear-based irrational decisions.

But guilt can also be your greatest enemy. There are two different types of guilt and knowing the difference can determine whether you learn to become confidently authentic. Both types of guilt feel the same physically, so it will take rational analysis to know the difference between the guilt that helps you and the guilt that leads you astray.

This book is all about using curiosity to find the truth. Discovering the different meanings behind your guilty feelings is as important as anything else we'll talk about. To allow us to discuss these feelings, I've given them names. I like to make up my own words because it makes me feel intelligent. You'll just have to put up with it.

Socially conditioned guilt is the feeling you get when you think you are not living up to other people's expectations of you. This guilt is attached to the bullshit identity that society raised you to believe was acceptable, attractive and safe. When I was clinging to my Nice Guy identity, I would feel socially conditioned guilt whenever I let someone down, disappointed someone, lost a competitive activity, or perceived myself to have hurt someone's feelings. Any time I saw myself deviate from what I believed a Nice Guy was, it would physically hurt me, like a warm wash of acid flushing through my guts.

Authenticity guilt is a much more reliable and helpful guilty sensation. It's a deeper and more meaningful feeling, an aching pain that touches your very core. It happens when the most intelligent and enlightened part of your brain recognizes that you did not live by your own values. At the beginning of this chapter, I asked Who do you wish you were? This is not the same as your identity. Your identity is who you have been conditioned to believe you should be. Underneath that your true values are trying to break through the identity. Your authenticity guilt is the sensation of your values screaming at you, trying to help you escape from your identity trap.

Socially conditioned guilt usually occurs in the short term. It's normally an immediate response to what you perceive as negative feedback or the risk of being disapproved of. This is like when someone yells at you for making a mistake and you feel badly about it.

Authenticity guilt, on the other hand, often happens long after the event has concluded, when fear has dissipated. It is a much worse feeling — a painful and sickening regret. It becomes a deep remorse that is as difficult to understand as it is to even acknowledge at all. It's when you look at your behavior, and even if other people approved of it, you don't feel good about yourself. You feel like you let yourself down and backed away from your true calling.

Authenticity guilt is like when you remember being yelled at the day before and feel badly about it, not because you upset someone, but instead because you hate yourself for not having been more assertive. You brain has registered your behavior and taken time to consider it, allowing for the rational frontal lobe to analyze it and compare it to the ideal person you wish you were. Authenticity judged you, and the assessment came back as FAIL.

For most people, authenticity guilt happens so late after the event that they feel helpless to do anything about it. It builds up over time because it is not dealt with quickly or effectively. Overcoming authenticity guilt requires courage, whereas overcoming socially conditioned guilt usually means taking the easy way out.

Before too long both of these are no longer recognizable as guilt. Instead they morph into other forms like stress, depression, rage, self-loathing and apathy. That's when it gets really difficult to tell the difference between feeling guilty for not living up to society's expectations versus feeling guilty because you didn't live by your values.

By welcoming authenticity guilt into your life and seeing it as a messenger telling you how to change into the person you wish you were, everything starts to become clearer. Instead of trying to convince yourself that it would have been inappropriate to stand up to the person who yelled, you can acknowledge that standing up for yourself would make you feel better about yourself for a longer term. You can accept this information as advice, given from your highest self to your frightened self.

Dealing with socially conditioned guilt usually requires doing something you are comfortable with, like bowing down to other people. People-pleasing is what usually relieves this kind of guilt, so if you feel like you have to "make someone feel better," or gain approval in some way, you can be pretty sure it's that fake socially conditioned guilt you're feeling. The next time you feel that compulsion to fix someone's view of you or prevent them from disapproving of you, try asking yourself What value would I be living by? Or is this just fear of disapproval?

Dealing with authenticity guilt is not easy because it requires discomfort — doing something that scares you a little and creates a perceived risk of negative consequences, like standing up to people and risking rejection. Here we start to see the benefits of discomfort. Behaviors you feel frightened of are often required to close the gap between who you are and who you wish you were (though there are exceptions).

To use a real-life example, I recently had someone close to me act in a hostile way toward me for an entire day. My socially conditioned guilt told me that I had done something wrong to offend this person and that it was my obligation to make them feel "better". But then I did some journaling and asked myself how I truly felt about the situation, and I realized quickly that I felt unfairly punished because the other person had not been honest with me about what was bothering them. Then I felt authenticity guilt about allowing them to manipulate me with the silent treatment. So I sat them down and told them to get the problem out in the open or start being nicer to me, and that I was not going to tolerate this indirect, passive-aggressive approach from them. The situation was uncomfortable and the discussion went for quite some time, but eventually it was resolved in a healthy way. This is how confident people sort out personal conflicts.

So if you feel guilty about your behavior because you see it as cowardly, it's probably authentic. You should listen carefully to that feeling and what it's telling you to do differently.

AUTHENTICITY IS FLEXIBLE

Who you are "authentically" in any given moment is a constantly changing thing. In every new moment, you are exposed to a different and unique combination of thoughts, moods, inner sensations and environmental factors. The potential variety of combinations is so impossibly vast that you will never repeat an experience. You will never repeat anything exactly twice, as the factor of how long you've been alive is always increasing.

Take a moment to allow that to sink in; you have never repeated the same situation ever in your entire life. One of the most harmful catalysts that encourage clinging to a horseshit identity is the idea of "I am the same person all the time." You aren't.

The idea that authenticity is rigidly consistent, like an identity, is ridiculously impossible, yet we get attached to identities and unchanging structures (rules) as if they somehow will always make sense. It's like sticking with the first mobile phone to ever be invented and refusing to upgrade. It won't be long before you realize you have much fewer options than other people, and after a few decades you may not even be able to make a call. An identity is much like that; at some point in your past it seemed to serve a helpful purpose, but now it's pitifully outdated. Imagine the difference of having a phone that upgraded itself every day.

However, there is some consistency to being authentic, a kind of compass that keeps everything flexible but still assertively steered toward a certain understanding of what is "right." We'll cover this more in the next chapter on Values. Yet even the values themselves are flexible, such as the millions of different ways you could be courageous; the idea of acting in spite of fear is consistent, but the manifestation of courageous behavior could be anything from saying no to your boss to taking a bullet to protect someone. It all depends on the context you're in at any given moment.

Authenticity is not a solid identity structure but a flowing, adaptable state, one that adjusts to all new variables to remain powerful, joyful and free of guilt. Authenticity is water; identity is ice. Water will always find a way to survive as successfully as possible, whereas ice can be shattered by a trauma.

To live authentically we must constantly change and adapt, which means you must constantly and frequently search for your next "true self." This is the clearest definition of the Explore phase.

AUTHENTICITY IS THE QUESTION, NOT THE ANSWER

Confident people are, in part, adventurous researchers. A true sense of living comes from the thrill of the hunt. Whether it's the next opportunity or the next insight, every time we learn something new we become more than what we once were. We upgrade. Confident people accept uncertainty.

Sometimes painful insights create a sensation of going backward, like feeling that you've been living a lie and must restart from the beginning. But the truth is you are never restarting. Instead, you build on top of what you already have and reprogram outdated or unhelpful patterns, creating something new.

Forget finding a long-term consistent identity. To seek such a thing is a fallacy; you're chasing something that will only ever hold you back. You will always change because time will always change you — no matter what you do to avoid it. Stop fighting this; embrace it. Surf the wave of change instead of drowning in your attempt to stay in the same place.

When I was stuck in being a Nice Guy, all I looked for were ways to be even nicer. I wasn't truly exploring through open curiosity; I was simply increasing the size of the identity I already had. For the longest time, it simply never occurred to me to consider another way of living. When I made the switch to living by values, particularly the value of honesty, I immediately saw how much I was lying to myself through clinging to my identity.

My brain was so committed to the Nice Guy persona that I would even stick with it during times it was obviously not helping me. I would see potential friendships and relationships slip away from me because the person thought I wasn't interested. I watched opportunities pass me by because I was afraid that going for them would hurt someone else, even though I knew rationally this was not true. I was literally sitting there and watching my brain avoid rewards that were perfect for me, simply

because it refused to let go of me being a Nice Guy. Don't let this pointless suffering happen to you. Open your mind by asking, "What else could I be right now?"

Instead of fighting identity loss and change, you can embrace it, harness it like surfing a wave, and grow consistently more powerful. This does not come from resting on a single answer. Instead it comes from using the most recent answer to pose yet another question. Curiosity, the beginning of The 3X Model, is about asking the next question that most requires an answer.

Always and forever, until you die. Simple.

Chapter Five: Fuck the Rules

At this point you'll have realized there are some technical difficulties in the Explore phase for creating and maintaining authenticity. First, you can't really predict what you'll need to do in the future to be authentic because you'll have changed significantly by then, as will your circumstances. Second, if there's no identity structure to inform your decision making, how the hell are you supposed to know what it means to be authentic at any given time?

This is where the wonderful concept of Values makes an appearance. Discovering your core values and learning what it means to live by them will build you into a person who is simultaneously changing while remaining consistent to a foundation. Like a kite with a long string that is tied to a pole; free to maneuver without getting lost. It seems to be a paradox at first, but bear with me as we explore values and how they are implemented in a practical, behavioral way.

As far as I can tell from the endless case studies I have experimented with, values do not change for an individual. They remain consistent throughout a person's life. However, the actions taken to live by these values, and the importance and relevance of any one particular value at any given time, are subject to constant change.

An analogy for this is building a house. At any given time, you are focused on a different part of the house, using different methods to build and do a different job every day. But no matter what, you are always building. Therefore, the value for putting together a house is building while the methods and areas of focus fluctuate according to what is most helpful right now. See how something like building can be consistent yet simultaneously changing all the same time? This is how a value works.

The Explore phase is where you answer two important questions. First, which value is the most appropriate to guide the actions you're about to take, given the circumstances and context, i.e., which value is most suited to this situation right now? And second, what behavior would be an honest best attempt to live by that chosen value? Answering these questions is the essence of having nothing to lose.

Values are easily confused with many other concepts, which is why people struggle to find authenticity. We are misled by societal influences to believe we are living by our values when we are actually doing the complete opposite. We are deceived into thinking our decisions are aligned with what is "right," through misunderstanding concepts such as virtues, goals and outcomes.

For that reason, and because of my overarching theory that you already know deep down what it means for you to be authentic, the best way to learn your values is to first unlearn what you have been manipulated into believing about values. What remains after that will be a stronger understanding of how to live by your values, how to be authentic, and therefore how to be yourself. It's time to explore your actual values.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VALUES AND VIRTUES

Virtues are like legal laws; they are created when an authority of some kind decides to prioritize certain values over others and dictates guidelines as to how these values should be expressed. Religion, law and company policy are all examples of systems based on virtues.

For example, the Christian, Judaic and Islamic churches tell you the rules you must live by and how to live by them through what are called the Ten Commandments. In these systems, we see an authority figure proclaim that there is unified agreement on which values are the most important (commandments), and how each value should manifest through behavior (how to live virtuously).

The first most significant distinction between values and virtues is that a virtue requires the agreement of others, while living by your values does not. Virtues also differentiate from values in two other important ways.

1) No one value is the most important

No one value is consistently more important than any other; importance is only relevant to specific real-time context. For example, the value of courage may be more important than the value of caring during a situation that requires you to stand up for yourself, but overall caring is just as important for a balanced and meaningful life. Perhaps after you've stood up for yourself you can help the other person come to terms with the new boundaries. You go from courageous to caring in a single interaction. Values require you to explore the current context and figure out the best value fit.

One client I was working with would often have to balance values on a minute-to-minute basis with his partner, at least at first, while he established boundaries for the first time. He had set a precedent of having tantrums when he didn't get his way rather than calmly and truthfully explaining his boundaries. Over time he learned to say things like, "When you behave this way, it goes against my value of honesty." As he learned to replace insecure aggression with rational assertiveness, his partner positively, if somewhat reluctantly, reacted to the change. He would then practice compassionately accepting her reaction and helping her with it as a show of respect for her sticking with him through his changes.

2) Living by values is adaptable to context

How you live by the chosen value is also an in-the-moment decision, not requiring a pre-planned and pre-agreed action (though this can be helpful too, particularly when you are just starting to learn valued living). Sometimes courage means standing up for yourself, other times it means walking away, and there are an infinite number of other possible ways to engage in the value of courage. There are no rules as to how you can live by courage. As long as the actions you take include you choosing to feel afraid and sacrificing comfort for integrity, you are living courageously.

Later, when we discuss Confidence in greater detail, the unhelpful limitation of caring what other people think will be explored deeply, and we will look at why allowing other people to have complete power over what you believe in will reduce your confidence rather than build it. Following virtues is an example of allowing others' opinions to make your decisions for you.

Therefore, if you agree with the notion that confidence must be self-contained and self-regulated, you will need to let go of the concept of living in a virtuous way. This does not mean you have to abandon your society or Church, it's just about coming to your own understanding as to how you should be living. Gaining society's approval does not align with authenticity or confidence and is not a requirement for enjoyment of life.

You do not need to agree with this yet. Just allow me to plant that seed between your ears and let it grow.

I did an experiment once where I stopped being nice to people. I had just finished reading No More Mr. Nice Guy by Dr. Robert Glover and had decided to see what would happen if I simply stopped trying to help other people for a while. It was unbelievable. Of all the terrible consequences I imagined in preparation for this experiment, none were even close to the shock of the actual result — nobody even noticed! Turns out my help wasn't really being asked for in a majority of cases; I was actually imposing help on others without their permission. I actually felt guilty for imposing on these people, yet "being helpful" was a virtue I had lived by unquestioningly my entire life. Nowadays, I only help people who ask for it.

COMMON VIRTUES TO BE AWARE OF

For each of the pseudo-values we'll be discussing, I'll point out from a personal perspective what I believe are some of the most debilitating virtue-myths promoted within mainstream culture. This is based largely on the suffering I help my clients with. Here are some virtues I see as being widespread and unhelpful.

- You must have a limited number of sexual partners and stick with one of them for your entire life, even if you stop loving them (a mistaken understanding of the value of loyalty).

- You must sacrifice your own enjoyment of life if doing so makes it easier for someone else to enjoy theirs because their quality of life is your responsibility (a mistaken understanding of the value of caring).

- You must have a stable job with a predictable income (a mistaken understanding of the value of security).

- You must be deferential to people with perceived higher social status, such as people older, richer or more popular than you (a mistaken understanding of the value of respect).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VALUES AND GOALS

Living by your values is not something where you can actually achieve a final result. You will not be able to one day wake up and say, "I've been courageous enough now. I never have to live by the value of courage again." Values require you to live by them until you die, if you want to be authentic, which means they will never be finished.

Values create an endless series of binary decisions; you're either living by them or you're not. At any given time, you can make the switch. Goals, however, are defined by their very ability to be completed. You can finish a goal, but you can never finish a value.

I think of goals as a compass, guiding you toward an authentic lifestyle and making it easier to live by your values. Yet most people I meet set goals based on virtues, thinking they must achieve certain things to be approved of by their community. Goals are helpful, but only until they no longer support living by values. Quite often you are led astray by goals that are set too far in the future. Even if they were originally based on an understanding of your values, you have changed in the interim and what it means to be authentic has changed with you.

A very common example of this misunderstanding is the pursuit of money. By calling money a career, people chase the Almighty Buck from one source of stress to another, reassuring themselves along the way that they are doing what is "right." Bear in mind the odd concept that money does not actually exist. It is simply an agreement of value between different parties.

Pursuing money as if it was a value is like pursuing large biceps as if they represented good balanced health. Big biceps seem healthy and are considered by society to be a virtue of health, but in reality they are not a reliable measure of health. Just like money is not a reliable measure of determination, courage, respect, or any other value. You can be a cruel, unethical, valueless, soulless bastard and achieve great financial wealth.

Any one of us can be lured into this outcome-dependent trap. There's a man I know who has achieved enormous financial success and has the boat, the flash cars, the mansion, and the respect. Yet every night he drinks himself to sleep, and at every party he brags about his wealth. Why? Because he's still not satisfied and he still has unstable self-worth. He doesn't yet realize that self-worth built on numbers in a bank account or possessions is terribly inconsistent and unreliable.

If you can establish an understanding of your values before you set goals, your goals will support your authenticity. Instead of chasing money to feel confident, you can cut out the middleman and pursue confidence directly, by setting goals that focus on living by your deep core values. Money may simply become one of the many tools that assist your journey. You can reframe money from being a precious possession into a helpful yet dispensable resource to support value-based living.

One simple approach is to start with an overall goal of becoming authentic and confident without the need for external rewards or validation. All sub-goals can be aimed at supporting this. They will be flexible and change according to the most effective way to find authenticity and confidence at any given time. For example, I might have a goal for going to the gym, but it is not about looking good for others, it is about the self-respect that comes from maintaining my health. This is a goal that supports the value of respect. And as soon as I identify a more respectful way to manage my health, I can ditch the gym goal and exchange it for something more up to date.

Goals that are not adaptable will eventually lead you away from your values and toward dissatisfaction, like the millionaire who wakes up in a panic one night when she realizes she's still unhappy or the married man who cheats because his relationship didn't remove the feeling of loneliness. I discard goals regularly the minute they steer me away from integrity, and I haven't regretted it yet. Ok that's a lie, but after the regret, things work out in the longer term.

COMMON GOALS TO BE AWARE OF

- Become financially independent (a mistaken understanding of the value of secure).
- Become physically attractive (a mistaken understanding of the value of acceptance).
- Get married (a mistaken understanding of the value of connection).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VALUES AND RULES

A rule is something you use to explain your perceived limitations of the world, something that dictates options for behavior and restricts what you can do. I don't use the word "law" because it has a different connotation. Breaking the law is based on a communal agreement and usually has measurable punishments when caught. Breaking rules, which you've created for yourself alone, feels like a punishment only if you allow yourself to be convinced you are "wrong."

Also, the laws of physics, for example, describe something we cannot consciously gain control over, whereas rules outline a completely subjective structure that only exists inside your mind. Simply put, there's not much you can do about gravity, but whether you walk up to a stranger and say hi cannot

really be prevented by anything in the physical world. Only your internal rules can stop it from happening.

Rules are another example of how your brain likes lazily simplify a complex world by pretending there is a basic understanding of how you can and cannot interact. These rules appear to have good reasoning for their existence, yet they have a more detrimental impact on your ability to enjoy life than just about anything else.

Rules have the short-term reward effect of making life seem simple and understandable. However, like any short-term reward system, there is a long-term punishment. And that punishment is an internal slavery. For a rule to exist, freedom must be sacrificed. Rules attack an abundance of choice and reduce it to a few options. In your brain's attempt to keep things simple, it imprisons you with rules.

Some rules are helpful. Looking both ways before you cross the road is a useful survival rule to follow and is unlikely to sacrifice your integrity. The same applies to rules like "don't murder innocent strangers," or "treat people with respect." These rules aren't the problem (though they can still get in the way during extreme situations). The kind of rules we're talking about are things like "don't rock the boat," "it's shallow to be attracted to someone before you get to know them," and "if you don't think you'll be able to do it perfectly, don't even bother starting it."

Virtues are publicly accepted and understood rules, but I've separated rules as its own category because most of the rules holding you back have very little to do with publicly agreed-upon evidence. If you break a virtue in, say, a church setting, you might be immediately "punished" and shamed by the congregation. However, when you break a rule that you created all by yourself, there will often be no evidence that anyone else even noticed. They may notice that you held back or missed an opportunity, but most of the time you'll be suffering completely at your own hands.

Perfectionists are a great example of the suffering caused through living by rules. Ironically, while some people call themselves perfectionists, their inability to let go of small imperfections leads them to mediocre completion standards and frequent procrastination. It's pretty hard to get something finished, or even started, when a voice in your head is saying, "Get this perfectly right or everyone will think you're a total loser." Even high performers who achieve impressive results are often unable to enjoy their successes, as their mind constantly punishes them with "it could have been better."

We live by our rules and think we are being authentic. We even congratulate ourselves on our ability to follow our own rules, never stopping to ask whether the rules should be tested or challenged for truthfulness.

As we'll discuss in more detail later, an effective way to build confidence is to strategically set about discovering and breaking all of your rules. Like chipping away at the walls of your prison, each day you'll slowly increase the amount of freedom in your mind.

Side note: in my experience, most "rules" are aimed at social harmony and are centered around how we should and should not engage with other people. This often means they only apply to social contexts. People I've spoken about this confirm that they let most of their rules go once they are alone or feel safe in another person's company.

COMMON RULES TO BE AWARE OF

- I cannot engage socially with people unless there is a relevant reason (a mistaken understanding of the value of respect).
- I cannot do something that might offend someone else (a mistaken understanding of the value of caring).
- I must try to win at all costs (a mistaken understanding of the value of determination).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VALUES AND OUTCOMES

A major distraction from living by your values is thinking that certain results are an accurate measure of authenticity.

Our values are lived through actions, which of course cause reactions, also known as outcomes. Sometimes we see a reaction to our valued living as being the only measurable proof that we are doing things "right," so we get locked onto this one outcome and over time lose track of the original value we were trying to live by. For example, you might get praised for working long hours, and think that you should therefore always work long hours to live by the value of determination, simply because once you were praised for it. We think that a single result consistently repeated represents living with integrity. This is a mental trap set by your mind in its never-ending search for simplicity and instant gratification.

When I first began working for the Department of Corrections, I was rewarded for hard work and skill development by receiving a promotion in my first eighteen months. I quickly came to the subconscious conclusion that a promotion was an accurate measure of work ethic, determination and mastery. It wasn't until much later, when I wintessed people woefully inadequate for the roles they were promoted to succeed over such obviously more effective people that I realized I was mistaken in my assumption that promotions were a measurement of good work.

Outcomes are the by-products of living by your values, not the values themselves. A large financial windfall may be an outcome of living by the value of determination, but it's not the only way to measure whether you are determined. Having sex with someone new might be the result of having been courageous with that person, but getting laid is not a reliable measure of courage. Receiving encouragement and praise may come from showing respect, but you do not need other peoples' recognition to respect yourself.

Outcomes are in the same supply-chain as goals, where we aim goals at an outcome rather than toward living by values. We assume the outcome will guarantee a valued living system, but often our single-minded focus actually creates the opposite — an outcome-based system. In simple terms, we try to get something external rather than trying to live by our values.

Outcomes will often come when you are living by values. You'll know of people receiving rewards for being confident, but I sincerely believe it's a mistake to allow outcomes and results to become the source of your confidence. Outcomes and results are what you get when you live by your values, but they are not actually a reliable measure of how well you lived by your values. Think of results as icing on the cake; positive outcomes are an optional bonus rather than the reason to act.

School trained you to believe that you are only doing well when you get good results. In my first book The Legendary Life, I briefly referenced something I call the "Red Pen Effect," which is the feeling of shame you get when the teacher punishes you for getting the answers wrong. We were all

raised on a system that taught us to use outcomes as a measure of how "good" we are as people, and how worthy we are of love, respect and happiness.

Unfortunately, that's all just a big load of scarcity-avoidant fear-based bullshit.

Imagine you have two students. One is academically gifted and scores highly in all her exams. Another is dyslexic and fails significantly at nearly all her subjects. The first girl goes on to take up a safe job and contribute little to society. The second girl is kicked out of school and ends up living in a commune. Who is living a better life?

The correct answer is "I don't know." Nothing about the above information tells you anything about their quality of life. Perhaps the first girl's financially safe job is totally unsatisfying, and every day she regretfully wishes for a different life. Or maybe the second girl overlooked a talent for acting due to social pressure and has avoided pursuing that which she enjoys most. How well they did in school has no bearing on whether they are living in a valuable way. Perhaps they both are; we cannot tell from their outcomes alone.

Valued-living focuses entirely on the process of living, not the outcomes. Values are a guide to how you can live in each moment, which will provoke reactions considered either "good" or "bad" by other people. What's interesting about living by values is that over time the more authentic you become, the more suitable results and outcomes you will experience. You will start to trigger reactions based on an honest representation of your true desires, which will encourage results that match you specifically. They may not be outcomes approved of by others, but they will often be outcomes that you enjoy.

I see this happen often within my Brojo community. Someone will start living more by the value of honesty over time. At first, this creates conflict amongst their social circle. People become upset with the sudden upgrade of honesty; the apparent change in the person's character. Some people will leave them, but others will come to love them more. Over time, a new social circle is created, full of people they love and who love them in return. It takes a while, but honesty pushes away bad-fit relationships and magnetically attracts and builds good-fit relationships, each subjectively unique to each individual.

When you let go of an outcome like marriage as the sole measurement of how caring, honest and respectful you are, your world opens up to all sorts of other potentially more enjoyable outcomes. You might find that sleeping around is a fun and playful way for you to live right now, and if it wasn't for society's virtues and rules being stuck in your head, you would thoroughly enjoy it. You might also see that you can have multiple partners without being dishonest, callous or disrespectful. Later, you may meet someone and monogamous marriage becomes a suitable action to live by your values. None of these options are better or worse than any other.

All I'm saying is to let go of the idea that there's only one possible outcome for living by your values… because there are billions! Outcomes are a poor measure of values, thought once you build confidence they can become a reference source for feedback during reflection.

COMMON OUTCOMES TO BE AWARE OF

- Marriage (a mistaken understanding of the value of caring)
- Cheating on a partner (a mistaken understanding of the value of freedom)
- Approval or acceptance by others (a mistaken understanding of the value of respect)

- A management position at work (a mistaken understanding of the value of leading)
- Feeling comfortable (a mistaken understanding of the value of integrity)

Chapter Six: Who You Really Are

So what are “values” then?

Values describe your intentions and efforts. They are the motivation behind your actions — the desire and guidance to do the “right” thing, taking into account the unique moment of time your decision is being made. Values are the principles you are attempting to live by — themes that represent different sides of your authentic self.

Imagine that “authenticity” is a multifaceted object, like a many-sided diamond; values are the different sides or facets of the authenticity diamond. At any given time, one value can become more helpful and relevant than the others, only to be replaced by another value as the moment passes and a new moment begins. For example, I might be assertive to stand up for myself, then switch to caring when the other person gets upset about this, then switch to honesty to point out that they upset themselves, then back to caring as they get even more upset about this.

Values are the vehicles that bring your authenticity into the real world in a measurable, impactful way. Values are the blueprint for being yourself. Learning to live by your values is a life-long process, so you don’t need to worry about fully knowing or understanding them immediately. You might never achieve a complete understanding of them, so you can go ahead and release yourself from that burden.

The very art of trying to live by your values is authenticity. It’s your best attempt with the information available to you; it’s all about the effort you make. That will be the most authentic you can ever be. Being yourself can change from being a set structure, a thing, into being a consistent effort you make to live by your values.

I have three questions I’d like you to answer before you continue reading. Answer these on a piece of paper (or talk them through if writing is not a preferred option).

What do I think it means to be a good person?

What do I see in people that makes me admire them?

What do I tell myself about the people I envy?

Take your time to describe the answers to these before reading another more. Once you’ve answered them, I’ll share the secret these questions are designed to uncover. No peeking now! Do the exercise before you move on.

BEING A GOOD PERSON (SOFT VALUES)

Most people think of themselves as a “good” person, except in cases of depression and other mentally difficult states that create ongoing self-worth issues. “Good” is not the same as “worthy;” instead it describes a state of being where you can basically say to yourself, “Overall, I’m a good person.”

An astonishing discovery I made when working for the Department of Corrections was that most of the offenders I managed basically saw themselves as good people. They would justify, blame, minimize and avoid any evidence that they weren’t good, demonstrating that they basically saw themselves as good people who were “forced” to do harmful things.

Once I became a coach, I saw this in others as well, and realized that we all have a process for managing our perception of reality to be able to call ourselves good. Your brain does not like the discomfort of feeling guilty about your behavior, so when this occurs it immediately goes to work on justifying, minimizing, blaming and avoiding acknowledgment of your value mistakes.

This process is represented in the conscious awareness as an identity of a Good Person. Your brain is willing to sacrifice evidence and logic completely to return to a state of feeling like a Good Person. So whenever you feel a desire to reassure yourself that you're a Good Person, you should become wary, because it means you are trying to convince yourself about your own behavior. Explaining your own behavior to yourself is a classic warning sign that you've breached your values.

Therefore, your answer to the question "What do I think it means to be a good person?"" was most likely a description of how you currently view yourself, or at least how you view yourself after you remove guilt. Check again. Is that the case? Sometimes there are exceptions where my clients answer this question with what they admire in others more than what they see in themselves. We'll cover that in the next section.

When I do this exercise with my clients, they often highlight behaviors they see themselves as regularly exhibiting and living by. Many of my clients are "people pleasers," so I commonly get answers to the Good Person question that include "caring, compassionate, generous, nurturing, kind," etc., showing a strong bias toward a limited number of values.

Regardless of your answers, the values they represent will probably all have a particular theme in common — you are comfortable living by them. It requires little effort, fear or discomfort to live in this Good Person way most of the time.

Your answers to this question therefore show the values you find easy to live by and are currently engaging in (with evidence to show for it). These are what I call soft values because they require little effort or courage on your part to live by them. As we move forward in the art of building your confidence and authenticity, keep these values in mind as the ones that possibly do not require more effort on your part right now. You've already got these sorted out and you gain no additional confidence to live by them.

That said, we often convince ourselves that we're living by values when deep down we know we are not. These might simply be the values you've convinced yourself you live by when in reality the evidence does not support this. For example, you might think you're living by the value of caring if you constantly give other people advice, yet if these people aren't asking for that advice, you're actually being judgmental.

Soft values often represent a plateau; in that they are the only values you consistently live by. This means you only get to be authentic when you engage in these values and this is usually restricted to when you believe it's appropriate to do so. You lose authenticity when these values are not appropriate for the present situation because you'll continue to live by them. For example, a Nice Guy like me will go on being compassionate and caring, even if the situation requires me to instead be assertive, courageous or honest.

A darker note — you may not be living by these values quite as successfully as you imagine. You might think of yourself as a Good Person, someone who regularly engages in caring and thoughtfully considerate acts. Yet values are not solely about the actions. They are about the reason behind the actions. If you are caring just to make people like you, that's not really caring, it's more a form of taking without permission (stealing approval). If you are considerate to avoid disapproval, that's not

really considerate. To live by values is to let go of external rewards. So your soft values may still need some work.

(At this stage you might be still wondering what your individual values are, as your answers did not make it clear. That's OK, we will go through a list of some values soon, and you can revisit your answers to determine which values they indicate.)

An example of this from my own life was when I used to support friends who were having issues. I would always try to say things that would make them feel better about themselves. You may be thinking what's wrong with that? The problem with taking this approach consistently is I would miss opportunities to truly be of service to my friends. Plus, I was judging them, assuming they were incapable of taking care of themselves.

I had one friend who would always self-sabotage her relationships by being overly paranoid and demanding, eventually driving her partners to betray her. I would tell her things like, "He just wasn't right for you" and, "It's just bad luck," trying to make her feel better. I convinced myself I was living by the value of caring, but was I really? I know now, after many years of coaching, that this kind of caring simply enabled her harmful patterns of sabotaging behavior to continue. Had I truly cared for her wellbeing, I would have risked losing her as a friend to deliver some hard truths about herself, which might have given her a real chance of breaking this cycle of suffering.

BEING AN ADMIRABLE PERSON (HARD VALUES)

Most likely your answer to the question "What do I see in people that makes me admire them?" was different to the question about what it means to be a good person. While we might consider ourselves and our current behavior to be mostly "good," it's in the people we admire that we start to see our own Authenticity Gaps most clearly. These people show us who we wish we were in small tantalizing glimpses. It's worth reflecting on the difference between Good and Admirable, particularly in your own answers, as it will show you how much you lie to yourself about what it means to be good.

The people you admire are some of your most helpful sources of feedback to become more confident and authentic. They are doing what you wish you were doing and this difference in behavior holds the secret for how you can close the Authenticity Gap. Your heroes, particularly the real-life people you have actual contact with (celebrities and other sources of worship are often misrepresented in media), seem to have figured out how to live by the values you struggle with. Either they have built the courage to do things you're afraid to do, or they've figured out how to live by a value that you find baffling and unable to put into effective practice.

Simply put, these people are living by your hard values. Their behavior aligns with the person you wish you were. Hard values are different to soft values in that they require conscious effort to live by, including uncomfortable trial-and-error experimentation, and they often require an acceptance of fearful sensations. Anxiety, confusion and doubt are common moods you will have to choose to experience in order to live by your hard values. We admire people who do this because deep down we intuitively understand they have boldly survived this type of pain to live as they do.

I remember the time I saw motivational speaker Kurek Ashley. I was at a property investment seminar and he was the guest speaker. His powerful posture and glistening bald head drew the attention of the crowd. Over the course of thirty minutes, he related a heart-breaking story to us. He described one of his best friends dying in his arms after a helicopter crash on a movie set. What I

remember being most moving about the story was not the incident he described, but Kurek's courage in revealing his own weaknesses throughout the story. He spoke of emotional breakdowns, alcohol and drug abuse, and depression. In him I saw what I was missing in myself — the strength to be vulnerably honest without needing the safety net of trusting the audience. I was seeing the hard value of courage.

Hard values are your most concentrated source of potential for confidence. The more often you can experiment with hard values, the more you will find yourself feeling proud of your behavior, worthy, and amazed at your capacity for achieving what you previously thought was impossible.

For the people-pleasers and introverts I like to work with, these values are often in the theme of words like assertive, determined, honest, courageous, consistent, integrity, and passion. Approval-seeking personalities seem to struggle most with values that risk social ostracism. Standing up for your beliefs and allowing someone to judge or hate you will prevent you from living by the hard values you yearn for, if you're the people-pleasing type.

I have also seen a loose theme whereby socially bold and extroverted people tend to find values like caring, empathy, and patience difficult to live by, while things like assertiveness, courage and honesty make up the soft values. These people might not "give a fuck what other people think," yet they find it difficult to create warm and loving connections with others as a side effect of this nonchalant indifference.

As a side note, I'd like to offer an escape from the identity prisons of "extrovert" and "introvert," which are personality tendencies but by no means a life sentence. Ten years ago I went through the highly validated "Big 5" personality testing— a battery of assessments found to be highly reliable and valid by scientific standards — and I scored highly for introverted. One year ago I took the same test and reversed that score while trying my very best to be as honest as possible, just as I had the first time around. It suggested to me that perhaps these pre-dispositions are not set in concrete as once believed.

First, there's the "outgoing introvert," an introverted person who learns how to express themselves more openly and decisively than they are originally inclined to do, replacing false modesty and overthinking with just the right amount of impulsiveness and boldness. Second, the "thoughtful extrovert," an extroverted person who decides to take the time to listen to others before speaking, plans for important events rather than relying on impulse and whim, and learns to enjoy being alone.

Hard values can allow you to release yourself from a seemingly pre-determined fate aligned to certain personality types and labels. One of my coaching clients is an extrovert and also measurably diagnosed as being on the Aspergers spectrum. Society would have him believe he is doomed to poor social skills and relationships, but it's simply not true. He has learned to work with his pre-dispositions and form close loving relationships through simply being unashamed, finding the right-fit people to connect with, and maintaining awareness of his tendency toward unhelpful social behaviors.

Your hard values hold the secret to becoming someone you admire, and you'll notice over time that the more you close The Authenticity Gap, through consciously choosing to take actions based on your hard values, the less you'll feel admiration for others. Instead, you'll simply appreciate and respect them for what they are — your equals.

One of the Brojo Captains, Rod Feitosa, told us in a group hangout the other day that for the first time in his thirty-seven years on this planet, he did not want to be anyone else. After a lifetime of low self-worth, loneliness and resentment toward society, he now felt bold and worthy — a man who has a gift to deliver to the world. All he did to achieve this transformation was continue to challenge himself to live more and more by his hard values. Day after day, one step at a time, his behavior closed the Authenticity Gap. The amount of pain he had to put himself through — that's right, living by hard values can hurt like a bitch — allowed Rod to feel that he has earned his place in the Universe.

It's simple. Learn to live by your hard values and you'll never again feel the need to ask, "What's the point of living?" Start trying to impress yourself with your behavior, to replace trying to gain the approval of others.

THE SECRETS REVEALED BY ENVY

The third and final question, asking you to explore your envy, often raises discomfort for the people I work with, which makes a lot of sense. We don't like to admit that we covet other people, as it shames us to think we are not yet complete. Envy is probably a leading cause of neediness, as we create a "hole" inside ourselves by wanting something we don't yet have. The difference between envy and admiration is we feel something unfair is taking place when we envy someone, while admiration is a more loving and appreciative sensation.

We must explore our envy to uncover the stories and excuses we use to avoid living by values. Guilt fades away when we replace it with envy and jealousy. The relief that comes from removing guilt acts as an emotional carrot, encouraging us to lie to ourselves about how we are powerlessly disadvantaged. When we envy someone, we essentially tell ourselves that we cannot hope to achieve what they have, therefore we have no reason to make an effort. We can then abstain from living by the values the other person has lived by and indeed refuse to even acknowledge that valued living was involved. Envy is our way out, a fictional story to avoid the pain of living by hard values.

I used to get this all the time in Corrections. I was trying my best to climb the management ladder, and I kept missing out to others. I noticed that I started to come up with irrational stories about why I was "losing" to other people. I told myself they manipulated the interview panel, crushed others in their climb to the top, and had connections with top brass so I never stood a chance. It took me a long time to realize that I hadn't even considered options like perhaps they were more qualified due to determination, had built a great reputation due to honesty, or had taken steps I was afraid to take because they were courageous. It was a lot easier to just lie to myself about how conniving they were than it was to face the hard values I wasn't living by.

Let's look at a basic thought experiment. Right now, I'm guessing you do not feel you are missing out on the supernatural ability to turn yourself invisible. No one else is able to do it, as far as we're aware, so there is no sensation of missing out. Yet if you woke up tomorrow and discovered that everyone else on the planet had figured out how to turn themselves invisible, but not you, how would you feel?

Some neediness is about survival, such as hunger or fearing a large predator. Most neediness, however, is a fiction we create inside ourselves when we perceive we are missing out. If everyone else got to be invisible, your most likely response would be to enviously tell yourself that everyone

else had better luck than you, whereas a confident and authentic person would ask, “What uncomfortable changes will I have to make if I wish to be invisible too?” Or perhaps the even more enlightened question, “Do I even need to be invisible?”

Your perception that others enjoy some benefit or advantage that is not available to you creates envy. The needy hole in your psyche tells you that you are unfairly being deprived of something enjoyable. Therefore, your answer to my question about envy gives you some insight into an important confidence factor — your insecurities and sense of entitlement. This is important, because when you explore these painful areas and go below the surface of your envious judgments and hatred, you will come face to face with the values you are neglecting the most.

Let’s say, for example, that you envy someone who has an abundant social life. You believe it is in some way unfair that they have more friends or fun than you because you don’t see them as being “better” than you. Deep down you suspect that in some way you are being punished without justice and perhaps even that this person has stolen what is rightfully yours. Despite how negative this all sounds, it’s a great place to start! Let’s look at how exploring this envy can be of benefit.

In order to transform envy into a helpful tool, we will need to dig past the initial surface reaction of perceived unfairness and maltreatment. One way to do this is to ask yourself, “If the person I envy has actually earned it through some form of hard work, what are they doing differently than me?” Going back to the example I gave before, the answer may be something like, “Well, he seems to be starting conversations with more people than I do, smiling more than I do, and less worried what other people think than I am.” Immediately we can start to see how the person we envy is possibly living by the hard values we are neglecting, like connection, honesty and courage. And overall we can see that he is socializing to live by his values, whereas perhaps you are socializing to get validation from others. He will be less needy and more attractive for this reason.

Envy is based in fear while admiration is based in love. Yet they are both allow us to identify where we are letting ourselves down the most with our poor behavior. Until you choose to take responsibility for the areas of your life that are not as enjoyable as you wish they were, you will be stuck in envy and unable to escape. As soon as you choose instead to use envy as a guide for what you are not doing, an infinite number of possibilities will reveal themselves.

Here are some common examples of envy being translated into hard values.

“They have more money than me.” They are taking bigger risks and branching out in their careers, which means I need to be living more by the values of determination, assertiveness and resourcefulness.

“They don’t have the kinds of problems I have and life is easier for them.” They take action to reduce hardship in their lives by taking responsibility for what they can control instead of complaining, making the most of what they have available. This means I need to be living more by the values of curiosity, responsibility, and courage.

“They have a loving relationship to support them. I don’t.” They were willing to face rejection to be authentic with someone else and create a vulnerable connection. They went out and met people and got uncomfortable socially to create more options, which means I need to be living more by the values of assertiveness, honesty and acceptance.

Yes, sometimes people are handed the things you want on a silver platter, and perhaps they don’t appreciate them like you would. Try to understand that the neediness you feel was not created by them but by yourself. That empty, hungry and shameful sensation of neediness is created by your

decision to not live by your hard values that are reflected in others and their lives. Envy is a good kind of hurt. It can be a wake-up call if you're willing to dig below the fear-based surface of justification, accusation and lack of responsibility. When you're living by your values and you see someone get something they "didn't deserve", it won't bother you because you'll be satisfied with who you are and their lives will be of little importance to you.

Marie Forleo, serial entrepreneur and thought leader, once said, "You have the same number of hours in the day as Beyonce." You can sit back and envy those who have the satisfaction and enjoyment you're seeking, or you can try to find out what they do differently. Until you are one hundred percent certain you are living fully and boldly by the values that challenge you the most, you are in no position to say you are disadvantaged in any way.

If you seriously believe that other people have it easier than you because of some unfair advantage, go live boldly and consistently by your hard values for a year. Then come tell me about it. And never forget, somewhere out there is someone who is envious of you. It's all completely subjective.

VALUES

We've talked about values a lot so far, in terms of what they are not and how to identify them. Let us now cut directly to the chase practically and explore some of the value words we can use to guide authenticity in action. The words we use are arbitrary; it's really more about the concept each word represents and, in particular, the actions associated with living by them. The first three are those most related to The 3X Model.

HONESTY

Possible synonyms: integrity, honor, truthfulness

I put honesty first. In my mind it is the single most important value to live by if you want to build self-confidence. Honesty is the antidote to shame. When you are open and honest about the truth as you see it, particularly the truth about yourself, you will expose the things you're ashamed of. At first, this is difficult and sometimes extremely uncomfortable, but over time the discomfort lessens to the point where shame transitions into pride and strength. The Explore phase is based in curiosity, but essentially we are curious about the truth; we search for honesty to prepare ourselves to take action in the Engage phase.

Some stories I often tell were once secret because these stories were attached to crippling amounts of shame before I believed in honesty. Now they serve as a way to express concepts to the people I coach, helping them to overcome the obstacles they struggle with most. My shame has become a weapon for self-development, and it allows me to uphold my "brand" of authenticity. All I had to do was get through the initial discomfort of sharing these stories the first few times. The more painful the story, the more times I had to tell it. This is probably why group counseling can often be effective in healing psychological trauma. I once shamefully hid the story that I used to suffer from erectile dysfunction as a result of anxiety, and now I can tell this story to a room full of strangers (or write it in a book) to help guys realize they are not alone in this.

Honesty, like all other values, can be displayed through an almost infinite number of behaviors. The key theme here is to ensure the words you speak and the actions you take accurately reflect what is true about you. Essentially, honesty is the absence of pretense.

I have found in my work that honesty is one of the most common hard values, and even straightforward or blunt people are not always sure of what their truth actually is. Being judgmental, for example, is a form of honesty, but it lacks accuracy. Staying in a job you hate because you want the money is kind of honest but nowhere near as honest as risking it all to pursue your dream job.

Write down examples of behaviors you consider to represent honesty. These examples will guide you on how be honest each day, in each moment, eventually leading to a state where you can spontaneously be honest without having to plan extensively for it. Here are some common examples to help you out:

- Say what you are thinking rather than moderating it to avoid offending/hurting people.
- Do a job you love rather than one where you feel safe.
- Ask for what you want directly rather than assuming others should know already.
- Allow yourself to experience and express painful emotions rather than suppressing them.
- Tell people the stories you are not proud of; tell people things you don't want them to know about you (this is the quickest path to self-acceptance).

CURIOSITY

Possible synonyms: questioning, interest, openness

In my favorite television series Entourage, actor and general nutcase Gary Busey makes a cameo appearance to proclaim, "Art is the search. It is not the final form." This represents curiosity for me — an open-minded search for the truth, combined with an understanding and acceptance that the truth can never be fully discovered. Through genuine curiosity we learn, grow and discover. We generally improve as we search for the truth and we plateau when we stop. Curiosity is the driving force behind the Explore phase and the most important ingredient for adaptability.

Curiosity is an active search for more meaningful information to guide your decisions. In a sense, it is a vehicle that allows mental evolution to take place over the course of a single lifetime. You can become a more adaptable, higher-functioning human simply by adding consistent curiosity to the genetic program you began with. Simply put, curiosity is about asking, "What's the truth right now?", "Who could teach me more about this?" and, "What's an even better way to do this?"

An oversimplified but helpful way to look at curiosity is to call it learning. To live by the value of curiosity is to do what it takes to change your mentality and understanding, to improve on what you think you know. This also identifies that confirming what you think you already know is not the same as being curious. For full and powerful curiosity to take place, you must begin with the basic Socratic acceptance of naivety — you know nothing at all for certain.

Hold onto your beliefs lightly if you want to live by the value of curiosity. Think critically about your own assumptions and search to be proven wrong rather than trying to prove yourself right all the time. Learning is about challenging what you know just as much as it is about confirming it. When I read my first book, The Legendary Life, it seems somewhat outdated to me. This tells me I've changed my beliefs and lived by the value of curiosity. I expect to feel the same about this book in future years.

Again, write down a list of curious behaviors you could choose to engage in. Here are some common examples:

- Listen to what people have said (waiting for them to completely finish speaking) before you even decide on what to say next.
- Participate in regular and consistent learning programs such as courses, hobbies and seminars.
- Constantly test and experiment with new ideas such as new ways to start conversations or different morning routines.
- Try new behaviors a little bit each day.
- Allow people to change your mind if they present compelling evidence; seek to prove yourself wrong rather than right.

RESPECT

Possible synonyms: balance, recognition, health

Confidence requires self-respect. It's about having trust and admiration in your own self, which places you in a position of freedom — freedom from envy and jealousy, freedom from being manipulated by other people's judgments of you, and freedom from the assumptions and biases you judge others with. Respect is about being able to look in the mirror, literally or metaphorically, and say, "You are worthy," without having to convince yourself of it. Respect is the leading value in the Release phase of The 3X Model.

It's easy to confuse respect as being "the recognition of something good." This is not respectful. Instead it is judgmental, because who are you to decide what "good" is? Respect does not need that judgmental tail at the end about being good. Respect is just the recognition part. Showing someone or something respect means taking the time to recognize and appreciate. We respect others by giving them our attention, care and recognition, and we respect ourselves by giving ourselves attention, care and recognition. We see all as equally valuable and yet we refuse to sacrifice our integrity for anyone.

Respect is about recognition of deserving to exist. When you respect someone else, it doesn't mean you have to like them or even enjoy their company, but it does mean you recognize their right to exist. The same is applied internally. When you give yourself respect, you remove shame from your actions while still learning from the acts that were unhelpful. People often mistake depression and sadness as negative emotions when in fact they can be framed as the sensations of respect — deep and powerfully reflective mental states.

Respect is also about acceptance of reality. I have not included a complete description of my perspective on acceptance, but I would definitely categorize acceptance as a value that aligns strongly with respect. When we allow ourselves to accept that reality is the way it is, that the past can't be changed and the future has not yet occurred, we show respect to the entire Universe. When we wish things were different, and use words like "should" and "could have been," we disrespect reality and move away from acceptance into confidence-defeating darkness.

Here are some common examples to give you ideas for creating your own list of how you can be more respectful, both to yourself and the external world.

- Journaling about your problems without trying to fix them, just recognizing and observing objectively to increase self-awareness
- Taking time to list everything you are grateful for, including looking at how harmful or traumatic incidents from your past have given you strength
- Resting and relaxing, allowing yourself time to digest, heal and contemplate
- Creating silence in conversations to give all parties a chance to reflect and understand each other better
- Allowing someone whose needs are greater to receive preferential treatment (e.g., giving up your seat to the pregnant woman on the bus)

Note: I know some people will balk at the second point above, the one about being grateful for previous pain. This is about understanding that the person you are now could not have been created any other way. Everything that has ever happened to you, or that you've ever done to others, has made you who you are this very second. Respect is about understanding that all of it could lead you to become a valuable person if you so choose. You can justify a horrible past by learning from it.

COURAGE

Possible synonyms: bravery, tenacity, determination

Courage is one of the values driven by the helpful emotional state of anger. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the ability to choose to feel afraid in order to do what you believe aligns with your values. You cannot be courageous without experiencing fear. So in order to live by this value, you will need to actively seek or create situations that generate fearful emotions like nervousness, anxiety, doubt, confusion and even embarrassment.

I feel that courage underpins most if not all of the other values, making it a core value, you might say. Often, particularly in the case of hard values, doing the "right" thing requires taking a risk. Without courage you will not feel motivated to face that risk and will of course back away from it. Courage is a manual override of your automatic fear response. Hopefully by now you are starting to realize that fear does not always have the best long-term intentions, so courage is available to allow you to manually shut down the effect fear has on your decision making. Sometimes, when the weather gets rough, the pilot must disable the autopilot and land the plane herself.

It's OK to be afraid! Unless you are afflicted with a severe or rare mental structure, like pure psychopaths or those people who can't feel pain, you will probably be afraid of things for the rest of your life. Confidence is not about becoming fearless because that is basically impossible and actually quite dangerous. (Imagine what would happen if you no longer feared being run over while crossing the road.) Courage is about learning to recognize when fear is being unhelpful and when an override is required. You won't override the sensation of fear — you will continue to experience that. You just need to override the decision fear is pushing you to make.

For courage, you'll need anger, as I stated earlier. How do you summon this anger? Start to reflect deeply on how you are not living by your values. Keep identifying and measuring your failure to be who you wish you were. Not to make yourself feel guilty (at least not only for that reason), but to get yourself mad! Get frustrated enough with your cowardice until you're angry enough to just do something about it.

Try listing everything you're afraid of, perhaps starting with a specific area like Social Fears. Here are some examples of courage that come up often for most people.

- Ask for a promotion at work that is out of your depth.
- Share a secret you have never told anyone.
- Stand up for yourself the next time someone tries to push you around.
- Speak louder and physically take up more space.
- Stop apologizing.

ASSERTIVENESS

Possible synonyms: boldness, decisiveness, insistent

Anger is constantly referred to throughout psychological texts as being a symptom of a disorder, a problem that needs fixing. Odds are, this is because of anger's connection with rage and violence. Yet without anger the world would quickly become a terrible place. Think about it.

Anger is the driving force behind both courage and assertiveness. To feel sufficiently motivated to take a stand, to place yourself at risk of negative consequences in order to protect what you believe in, you require internal power. That power does not come from feeling happy, curious or peaceful. When you get mad, you feel truly inspired toward action. The only issue with anger is most people don't know how to handle it, so they suppress it and abuse its power, leading us all to believe it's a problem.

Without anger, Hitler's Nazi regime would still be in power.

Assertiveness is about setting your own boundaries, but it's not about crossing someone else's (insecure aggression and dominance are often mistaken for assertiveness). Assertiveness, like all other values, does not require any form of participation from anyone else. You do not need to convince or move someone else in order to be assertive. You live by the value of assertiveness simply by refusing to tolerate someone crossing your boundaries. You might not be able to stop them physically, but you can at least have a say and refuse to buckle under their pressure.

I once had a senior executive within the Department of Corrections blatantly refuse to engage with me. I was sending him my findings from a site that managed offenders subject to a sentence of Community Work (often referred to as community service) because I believed that their outside-the-box approach was more effective than the standard operating procedure he was advocating. He would rarely reply to my emails, and he dismissed my ideas as lacking evidence.

So I nagged the shit out of him. Every day I sent him a new email with statistics and data and asked him what more he needed. When he failed to reply to my emails, I called him on the phone. When he didn't answer my calls, I left a pleasant message asking him to either call me back or respond to my email. When he didn't respond to any of my attempts, I copied his superiors into emails and asked if someone could please let him know that I wanted to have a chat.

No matter his behavior, I was able to live by the value of assertiveness consistently. Ironically, his resistance was the only reason I could live by assertiveness; had he agreed with me and made things easy, no assertiveness would be required. Sometimes, if we are truly accepting, we will see someone

fighting against us as a gift — an opportunity to practice assertiveness in a challenging arena. This frame or perspective makes confrontations a lot more fun!

Check out http://brojo.video for guidance on assertiveness and confrontations, and all the other values too.

Assertive actions will depend entirely on what boundaries you need to set or what beliefs you feel are worth fighting for. In any case, here are some common examples of assertive behavior:

- Be honest when you disagree with someone's perspective, but don't try to change their mind (no defensiveness).
- Challenge bullying behavior without trying to harm the other person vengefully (no aggression).
- Take a stand on a controversial matter at work.
- Pull someone aside and give them feedback on behavior you felt disrespected you.
- Venture forward with ideas and play the role of leader.
- Initiate something without waiting for permission.

PLAYFULNESS

Possible synonyms: light-hearted, enthusiastic, fun

Some might think this one seems out of place, like being playful is childish and cannot possibly be a serious value. And you're right. It's not serious. That's the point. When I investigate people who are failing to enjoy their lives, I often also see an abundance of seriousness. Taking life too seriously seems to lead people to become attached to outcomes, regret their past and stress constantly about the future. I should know; playfulness is actually one of my hard values. My passion for this work often leads me toward seriousness and away from fun.

If there's one thing we could learn from children it's how to live by the value of playfulness. Healthy children can be seen everywhere being fully present and exuberantly exploring the world. To children, the entire world is a playground. If you've ever seen a child create an complex imaginary community with inanimate toys, you know what I mean by the value of playfulness.

You can see this value in other mammals with higher levels of cognitive functioning. Dolphins and certain types of monkeys can be observed engaging in behavior that serves no obvious survival purpose, unless you believe that enjoying life is crucial for survival. Dolphins do not catch fish or evade predators by performing backflips and jumps, yet on a good day out fishing in almost any New Zealand harbor you can observe them doing just that. They are simply having fun. (Check out this great site for more on our connections with dolphins https://www.dolphins.org/areas_of_study.)

Without enjoyment, life loses meaning, and we can quickly become either apathetic or depressed. Playfulness is actually a form of learning; it's about experimenting with your environment to see what happens. If values link together like the branches of a spider's web, playfulness would connect curiosity to honesty. When you live by the value of playfulness, you start doing things for the sake of simply seeing what will happen rather than being emotionally attached to getting a winning result.

This is also a great way to generate courage – you can do live by values simply for the thrill of being afraid, like bungy-jumping.

Someone who is enjoying themselves while engaged in learning a new task is going to learn it more efficiently and effectively, and people who are engaged in tasks they enjoy are more productive. We used to believe that productivity came from being serious, but strong scientific data now suggests that the highest levels of productivity emerge when we are basically having fun. Dr. Stuart Brown sums it up nicely in his TED talk on the importance of playfulness: "If its purpose is more important than just doing it, it's probably not play." (https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital).

Playfulness is one of the more subjective values, in that what is considered "fun" will differ vastly from one person to the next. For me writing is fun, while for others it would be an absolute bore. But at a more core level it's about the attempt to have fun — the drive to be curiously playful regardless of your situation. It's about trying to make everything fun for you.

Here are some common examples:

- Play truth or dare, or any other game that inspires you toward more honesty and experimentation, with friends.
- Try something new each day while completely letting go of the need to be "good" at it.
- Push yourself to be your own version of ridiculous, just a little bit every day.
- Explore new environments like a discovering child, opening your mind to being surprised by anything that could happen.
- Fill your day with activities you choose to do because they fully engage your attention and bring you satisfaction. (You can also live by the value of playfulness through systematically removing unenjoyable activities from your daily routine.)

Author's note: Full credit to the incredible Dr. Russ Harris and the field of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Most of my ideas and beliefs around values originated with work of his that I am familiar with.

Except the soft vs hard values thing… I'm pretty sure I made that bit up.

Chapter Seven: “Look Your Best” and Other Fables

This book — indeed, my life’s work — is based on a simple theory. Self-confidence is the key to a satisfying, meaningful and enjoyable life.

Another reason for me writing this book is because I believe most confidence-building resources currently available are completely unhelpful. Why? Because most of them still focus on trying to achieve outcomes; a strategy that is ultimately counterproductive to being able to rely on yourself. It’s important for me to define what I mean by “confidence” in this book. I’d like to challenge any current perceptions you have about what it means to be confident. So I’ll start by debunking the five most common examples of the worst confidence-building advice floating around out there.

As you’ll see in these examples, there are some common themes I believe people have completely misunderstood about what self-confidence is and what is required to build it. First and foremost, you don’t actually build self-confidence, you rediscover it. You were born with all the foundational resources you needed, but over time, as you were raised in a largely fear-driven global society, this confidence was taken away from you. Or, more accurately, it was covered up; buried in shame, doubt and peer pressure.

In Dr. Alison Gopnik’s book The Philosophical Baby, we see strong evidence that from birth we are blessed with basic self-confidence. Babies and children are able to anticipate future events and plan effectively. They can demonstrate strong empathy, gratitude and compassion. They follow their authentic and unique desires to curiously discover deeper levels of truth about their world. They attempt and fail at tasks without shame. They are sure of themselves while remaining humble, and they seem ready to take on the world.

But what happens to these same children when they grow up?

I italicized without shame in the paragraph above because it highlights the counterpoint of confidence. People often mistakenly believe that the opposite of confidence is anxiety, fear or doubt. However, in my work I’ve found that genuinely self-confident people still regularly experience these emotional states. It’s fascinating how confident people are affected by these emotions differently than most others, and the difference is all to do with the concept of shame. A confident person accepts every emotional state equally, whereas those lacking confidence have shame attached to certain things about themselves. (We’ll look much more at this concept in the next book in this series.)

Basically, you were born shameless and then taught how to be shameful by others who had been unwillingly taught shame themselves. The blind lead the blind; ashamed people influence confident kids into becoming ashamed adults. Shame is like Superman’s kryptonite — it’s the one emotional state that cannot be experienced at the same time as confidence. Shame and acceptance are the opposing ends of the self-worth spectrum. Your life is a journey that begins at limitless confidence and gradually slides back toward the restriction of shame. The good news is you can learn to return to confidence and acceptance once more.

Because the blind are leading the blind, most advice available in the mainstream to help people “build” their confidence has been created by people who are ashamed and therefore unable to see the truth about confidence. They’ve simply convinced themselves that they enjoy life, most often because they are currently experiencing temporary external rewards. They give advice based on shame-avoidance rather than self-confidence, which means their guidance is:

- difficult to apply in real-life (lacks practicality), such as vague Facebook quotes and sentiments like “just be yourself” without guidance as to how

- often based on concepts that leave the power and control over confidence in the hands of others rather than the self. Progress becomes easily sabotaged by others and uncontrollable circumstances, such as articles like “10 Ways to Be More Likable,” and constant pressure to attain results that cannot be controlled.

- completely inauthentic, as these practitioners and gurus often don’t live by their own advice consistently or do not personally experience the rewards they promise to deliver

- scientifically invalid or based on temporarily helpful pseudo-scientific concepts (misapplication of Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a common one), which provide immediate relief but do nothing measurably valid to maintain long-term quality of life changes

- driven by fear rather than courage, avoidance rather than responsibility, and comfort rather than adaptability

So without further ado, let us delve into this bullshit and see what we find when we explore the lies about confidence.

THE 5 TOP MYTHS ABOUT CONFIDENCE

Myth #1: Fight “Bad” Emotions

This is worthy of the number one spot because it is the most prevalent problem I see in self-help and confidence support available at this time. There is a constant focus on a vaguely defined consistent emotional state — “happiness” — that is supposed to represent success and confidence. Many out there who wish to support you with building confidence and success seem to believe that only a small number of emotions are experienced by confident and successful people.

The term “happiness” appears to mean a number of different things, but from what I can see, it represents emotions like happiness (duh), peacefulness, calmness, excitement, and certainty. It’s incredibly rare to see a self-help guru promote frustration, disgust, anger, depression, anxiety or any of the other so-called “bad” emotions. There seems to be a belief that confidence is actually the ability to effectively suppress all bad emotions permanently and be rewarded with an almost ceaselessly blissful experience.

Bullshit.

The bad emotions are not the problem. The issue is that we label them as “bad” and teach each other to believe the labels. When you promote happiness as a virtue, you are effectively saying anything that is not happiness must be avoided. Indirectly, you are promoting the attachment of shame to completely natural and normal human emotions.

Because it is physically and psychologically impossible to completely suppress emotion, our attempts to do this have the effect of mutating and toxifying normal emotions into something more sinister and entirely unhelpful. We then start to see these mutations as the actual emotion (like believing that rage is the same as anger) which only further inhibits us from allowing ourselves to experience them.

Remember the last time you were anxious? Notice how you probably then got upset about being anxious because you believed there was something wrong with feeling this way. If you did this, you noticed how the original anxiety — a slightly uncomfortable range of thoughts and restrictive physical sensations — escalated into panic, self-hatred and hopelessness. The anxiety didn't cause all this pain; it was your lack of acceptance of the original anxiety in the first place!

We try to avoid anxiety and in doing so we destroy our motivation to do tasks that require discomfort. We fight against anger, which makes it mutate into rage and depression, and then we become afraid of being angry. We guilt-trip ourselves for being sad, which escalates the upset feeling because now we're upset about being sad. In our search for happiness, we try to avoid anything that isn't happy. In doing so, we just make ourselves miserable in the long term.

What would your life be like if no one had ever manipulated you to feel ashamed of any emotion? How would feeling OK about anger, anxiety and confusion change the way you lived? These questions changed everything for me and broke me out of an irrational pattern of happiness-seeking. I stopped trying to be happy all the time and instead started seeking out the full range of human emotional experience. To do this I had to prove to myself that it was OK to experience the emotions I had been previously trained to believe were wrong.

In my early twenties, I began developing a fear that I was psychopathic. I would attend a funeral and feel bored. I would finally get to see my favorite band in concert and my heart barely skipped a beat. Nothing would affect me, and at the same time I was learning all about psychopathy and the lack of feeling associated with the condition. Many years later, I realized that I was not psychopathic. I was simply numb due to a lifetime of suppressing emotion. The apathy that was suffocating my ability to experience life lifted once I started allowing myself to express my thoughts and feelings more honestly, a process that breathed life back into my emotional states. Shame had led to indifference; truthfulness rescued me.

When we discuss The 3X Model throughout this book, you will notice me continually referencing the importance of allowing yourself to fully experience all emotions. Through this you will start to notice that the supposedly bad emotions like anger, frustration and boredom are actually all helpful indicators about where you should be focusing your attention and energy. First, though, we'll need to challenge any unhelpful fears you have attached to the concept of experiencing normal human emotion. I have an exercise that may help you achieve this.

Challenge: Write a story about how each of the following emotions helps you achieve a rich, meaningful and satisfying life — anger, sadness, frustration, confusion, fear, boredom, depression and anxiety. If this is difficult, try to simply identify how each could act as a motivator for you, e.g., depression motivates us to reflect on our lives, anger motivates us to stand up for ourselves. Once you've done that, take some time to reflect on the difference between normal healthy emotion and the mutated toxic consequences of fighting and repressing these emotions.

Myth #2: Look Your Best

In almost every Internet list of confidence "building" strategies, we see something about the importance of managing your surface appearance and aesthetics. Even on relatively scientific websites, like Psychology Today, we see advice about how important it is to look your best if you want to feel confident. This is often packaged as a shortcut to the internal sensations we associate

with confidence and emphasizes the concept of being prepared for anything through managing your appearance.

Sigh… where to even begin? First, what about blind people? If looking "good" is required for confidence, being blind essentially removes your ability to be confident. Do you believe it's impossible to be confident in yourself if you have vision impairment? Some might say yes, and if you're one of them, I urge to read this entire book (or have it read to you)! To require vision to be confident would mean that every time you close your eyes, you lose it faith in yourself. Maybe this why we feel like crap when the morning alarm goes off? Too much not seeing ourselves due to sleeping? Ridiculous.

Sticking with the theme of vision for a minute, I want you to take a second to become aware of where your eyes are located on your body. Given that your natural resting position is probably looking straight forward, take a minute to become aware of what you can see. How much of yourself is visible to you at any given time? Odds are you can, at best, see some smudged and vague colors in your periphery indicating a torso and arms. It is unlikely that you can see your face, back, neck, legs or sides.

So if your argument for caring about your appearance is that you're looking good for you, we must be talking almost exclusively about the front of the top you are wearing, adornments on your upper arms, and perhaps your shoes. According to these confidence experts, if you really are dressing to make yourself feel more confident and it's not about other people's opinions, you are only really talking about the front of your shirt, possibly the top of your feet, and some gloves. Sounds a little silly, no?

Enough sarcasm, let's cut to the chase. Make no mistake about it, you are being advised to look good to impress other people, not yourself. You are being advised to seek subjective external approval. Unless you're in front of a mirror, shop-front window, taking an insecure selfie, or perhaps looking into a calm puddle, you cannot see yourself most of the time. Therefore, if how you choose to dress is based on appearance, it is for others, not for you. You are trying to gain confidence by manipulating social approval. Even more so is grooming, because even with superior peripheral vision you cannot see your own face beyond the blurry tip of your nose, and even with long hair you cannot see an accurate picture of your whole hairstyle.

Why am I going on about this in such a patronizing way? Because adjusting yourself to please other people is one of the key representations of shame. When you are making yourself look "good," it's not to create genuine and autonomous confidence; it's to try and get approval from others, which implies that disapproval is wrong. This is where we see the a sign of how most confidence-building advice is actually aimed at trying to gain more external validation, surrendering control of your confidence to others.

I'm no different to you. For most of my life I dressed differently depending on what situation I was going to be in. I soon came to realize that most of these situations were categorized as different social circumstances, meaning it was all about who was going to see me. In some situations, like work or going to a nightclub, my entry may be restricted by not conforming with the dress code, in which case looking "good" is a requirement to participate (incidentally, this is one of the main reasons I no longer go clubbing). However, in most situations, the only barrier to me dressing comfortably is my own perception of how others will judge me.

By using dressing and grooming yourself as a strategy to build confidence, you are simply aggravating the unhelpful pattern of using external and uncontrollable sources to measure your self-

worth. We see extremes of this in cosmetic plastic surgery and ridiculous trends (at the time of writing this book I'm envisaging "hipsters" with unkempt beards, man-buns and tight pants). There is an unmistakable pattern of either fitting in or trying to stand out, each shows evidence of low self-worth.

You'll have a million excuses that you've been trained to believe about why you should look good for other people. A common example is the job interview; very few people are willing to dress comfortably for a job interview. Why? Because someone told you that you shouldn't do it. But have you ever tested dressing comfortably and then living by values of assertiveness, honesty and compassion during a job interview? Have you ever tested this assumption?

I have. I once went to a job interview for a high level Corrections position. I was wearing a basic business suit, but I wasn't wearing a tie or jacket. I had my sleeves rolled up because it was hot, revealing my tattooed arms, and I didn't take out my earrings. I got the job. This was in a government department; if the rules can be broken there, they can be broken anywhere! I simply believed in myself because I was living by my values.

This does not mean you should never wear clothing you like the look of or never change your hairstyle, I'm simply pointing out that before you do this, it may help to be confident in yourself first, without needing to look good to others. Remove the risk of other people's opinions becoming the system you use to measure yourself. One thing that really helped me with this was spending as much time naked as possible. (Just around the house when I was alone, relax.) Getting comfortable with your own body before you decide you need to dress it up to please others will help you redefine physical confidence.

Challenge: Dress comfortably for an entire week (though you may have to stay within workplace regulations), by which I mean don't dress differently to leave the house than you do to stay in. I'm talking about no makeup, no uncomfortable trendy clothing, and only essential grooming. Just one week — you can do it! Just to prove to yourself that you can survive not looking "good."

Myth #3: Become More Skilled

Now this one is a little trickier and deals with the misunderstanding between what it means to be confident versus the concept of being competent. Much of the advice I've seen on confidence talks about building up skills and exposure to a specific situation to make you feel more confident. The problem with this advice is that it is partly true; the more skilled you are at something, the more confident you will feel doing it. However…

Competence is a temporary version of confidence, a context-based illusion that limits you to feeling confident only in areas you are skilled in. And yes, if over time you become skilled in many different contexts, an overall deep self-confidence can build. I actually support this approach if no other approach is available to you, but this takes a long time and can still be upset by anything that undermines your skill (for example, becoming paraplegic or otherwise physically changed in a way that removes your ability to be skilled at the tasks).

Ultimately, skill is measured by performance, an external measure that cannot remain consistent with valued living. Being good at influencing people, for example, will not guarantee that you use this skill in a way you believe aligns with your values. The confidence you get from being good at your job can be taken away by being fired. This is what I mean by competence being a temporary form of confidence; it's only a matter of time before it is taken away.

The kind of confidence I want to help you build is the kind that does not require skill, or more specifically, does not require you to know the situation. True self-confidence is about going into the unknown and still feeling sure of yourself and, even better, going into a situation you predict will go badly and still having the courage to continue. Competence-based confidence requires you to be skilled, which is another way of saying you should not fail. Values-based self-confidence, on the other hand, is about feeling the same level of confidence during failure as you do during success.

And here I'd like to share my definition of self-confidence.

"Confidence is a true and deeply ingrained belief that you can handle anything, including failure and the unknown, combined with the ability to accept and enjoy reality. It is essentially a deeply loving and trusting frame of yourself, supported by evidence of you frequently and consistently behaving in alignment with your core values."

Competence, by its very definition, requires external validation — an assessment by external sources (usually other people) verifying that you are good at what you do and by extension good as a person. As I will keep emphasizing throughout this book: any self-worth measurement system based on external validation is doomed to eventually fail. Put it this way; eventually you'll be too old and decrepit to be skilled at what you're good at now. Wouldn't you like to still be confident in your last few years?

There's a mafia quote from The Sopranos television show about competence-based confidence. "You are only as good as your last envelope." Essentially, any system that measures you on how skilled you are is always going to be based on your most recent performance. You could be an amazing athlete, good enough to be accepted into the Olympic Games, but if you come in fourth in your race you still "lose," and are therefore a loser. Any previous successes are disregarded and deemed worthless when it comes to the current performance. The fact that you have potential is irrelevant because you failed.

Perfectionists are invariably people who measure their self-worth using a competence-based system. This was me for most of my life. Like a coke-addicted movie star looking for a hit, I would move from one achievement to the next, never completely satisfied and always looking for the high that came with externally recognized "success." If I was facing a situation I felt unsure I could win, I would simply not start at all, therefore removing the risk of an imperfect performance, which I would perceive as a loss. I missed out on many great opportunities because of my neediness around competence.

I see this with men trying to gain confidence by seducing women. Each time they manage to manipulate a woman into having sex with them, they feel a surge of euphoria and accomplishment. They believe they have experienced true confidence and have earned it through their acquisition of yet another vagina.

But almost immediately, the feeling starts to fade. Within days they are in pursuit of another meaningless sexual experience because the confidence only lasts until they start to doubt their seduction abilities (an uncertainty that is never fully destroyed, regardless of the number of successful conquests).

On the other hand, I see men who instead focus on using honesty to connect deeply and don't keep track of the score. They often find themselves content and confident even when it's been a long time since they last had sex.

The problem with my competence-based perfectionism was that even though this approach drove me to succeed in many areas, I never actually felt confident in my ability to succeed for very long. There was always a crippling storm-cloud of doubt hanging over me. I had a session with my former coach Phillipe Drolet (awesome guy) about this, and together we discovered that I had a bizarre and irrational belief holding me back. Basically, I believed that the second I stopped achieving, the Universe would sneak up and take everything away from me. (For more about this, check out my article on high-achiever's guilt http://www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/feeling-alone-in-the-universe-the-secret-behind-over-achiever-guilt/).

What I now realize is that my fear of "everything" being taken away from me was actually a fear that my self-worth and confidence were attached to results. Because I was emotionally invested in my competence, the idea that I would be incompetent if I rested for too long meant that my self-worth would diminish with time. Not a very helpful system! This belief led me to have my first stress-related burnout, one of the worst experiences of my entire life. It drove me relentlessly forward while simultaneously robbing me of the ability to enjoy the process, like tumbling down a hill.

Tim Ferriss' book The 4-Hour Workweek and his revolutionary idea about being "good enough" saved my life. Ferriss is a master of achieving ridiculous things with minimal effort and is known for his abilities to master new languages quickly, compete at the highest levels of different sports with a fraction of the training of his competitors, and get things done in less than half the time others take (while maintaining the same standard).

In his books he emphasizes the concept of Maximum Efficiency Point (MEP), which is the point where extra effort becomes unnecessary and counterproductive. Once I understood this concept, I realized that often the effort I put toward most tasks was far beyond what was required, and there was no genuinely rational reason for it (especially at work). This caused so much stress in my life.

In order to create the time needed to rediscover and rebuild your pure self-confidence, you will need to let some things go. One way of doing this is to embrace the idea of becoming less competent in some tasks and activities in your life. If you're a person who measures their self-worth on achievements, results, and your perception of your own skill levels, a healthy first step is to explore the concept of "good enough."

Write down the top five areas of your life where you perform (are assessed by yourself or other people to a set of external standards). This might include your hobbies, like for me it's dancing and playing in a band. Or this might mean your performance at work, in the gym, or even in the bedroom! Try to figure out what "good enough" means and write that next to each. Remember, "perfect" or "the best" is more than good enough. Good enough is the minimum required to participate adequately. Learning where to be good enough will leave room and energy available for those areas you want to excel in.

Challenge: Once you've done this, I challenge you to aim to achieve a good enough standard only for an entire week of these activities, just to see what happens.

Myth #4: Control Your Thoughts

For the longest time I believed in the concept of "controlling" my thoughts. I followed practices like positive affirmations, where I would try to control my thinking through forceful instructions that I

gave myself. This was usually based on an identity of some kind, like “I am a confident man.” Through psychological practices like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and popular ideologies like Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), we are led to believe that thoughts can be consciously controlled.

They can’t.

That’s right, the idea that you can consciously control your thinking is about as scientifically flawed as believing you can accurately predict the weather. Both can be done with an illusion of success for very short periods of time, so we assume that with practice and adjustment we can achieve a longer term consistency. Unfortunately, like the weather, thoughts are massively sensitive to many millions of variables, so attempts to control them are futile in the long term.

It’s not a completely unsuccessful pursuit, which is possibly why NLP, positive affirmations, and other practices have become so popular. If you stay focused one hundred percent of the time and consistently follow strict guidelines with the patience and consistency of a samurai, you might be able to achieve some long-term control. This is akin to staying on a diet; a few can do it, but they are the ones with supernatural self-discipline and, most of the time, generally appear to be forcing themselves to comply with a completely unenjoyable process. Thought-control through this methodology can be achieved in temporary bursts, but only by a few people.

To put it bluntly, there are much easier ways to become confident! Trying to control your thoughts is an ineffective method for rebuilding pure self-confidence, and I believe this can be boiled down to three basic reasons.

First, most advice tells you in vague terms to avoid thoughts. “Don’t think like this” and “don’t think of that” are the general themes of such advice, leaving you to attempt the absurdly impossible act of thinking about not thinking, demonstrated by the old favorite, “Don’t think of a pink elephant.”

Such advice usually comes with a direction to perform what I call anti-actions — to not do something. “Don’t try to impress other people” for example, simply gives you one of the infinite number of options of what not to do, leaving you with the unenviable task of trying to figure out the right thing to do instead. Telling people to take anti-actions is the height of mentoring laziness and often demonstrates the advice-giver’s inability to understand what works. In other words, when someone tells you to not do something, they’re revealing that they don’t know what you should do instead.

Second, conscious thought is probably not what you think it is. We feel like thoughts are our mind’s language for making decisions and sorting out information, and everything important is happening in the space of our conscious awareness. We believe all thoughts are “real” and important. Yet the latest in neuroscience research shows two important things we need to consider: a) most “thinking” is done subconsciously before we become aware of it, and b) we make decisions emotionally, not rationally. Here's a simple thought-experiment you can try right now to see what I mean (stolen from neuroscientist and author Sam Harris — https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FanhvXO9Pk):

1) Think of a city.

2) Once you’ve thought of one, try to figure out roughly how many city names you have in your memory banks in total. How many city names have you heard of in your life? If it’s too many, just guess. It’s probably thousands.

3) Identify how your chosen city came to your conscious awareness. (For some people it just “pops” into the mind. For others a few choices swirl about the mind and then they feel like they consciously select one.)

4) Note that some part of your brain went through every city you’ve ever heard of and selected one for you without you being aware of this taking place (and note how quickly this happened).

5) Ask yourself why you think you chose that city, and identify the emotional reason behind it.

This exercise demonstrates that you do not actually make a decision consciously. You just think you do. The decision about which city you chose was done behind your back, so to speak, and your conscious awareness was basically sent a memo dictating which city had been chosen. Despite the hundreds or possibly thousands of city names you have stored in your memory, you did not give them all equal conscious attention before selecting one. This is your brain making it easier for you. It would have taken weeks to go through all of those cities consciously. You can imagine what it would be like choosing what to eat for breakfast if you had to consciously consider every type of food you’re aware of. Ain’t got time for that!

Your reason for choosing that particular city is equally as fascinating. I’ve repeated this test on dozens of people and each time their reason for selection is different. One guy chose a city he was mugged in over a decade ago; one girl chose the city she lived in currently; another told me their favorite place to travel to. There have been endless variations, and all of them have described a clear emotional attachment that made their city significant to them, perhaps more significant than all other cities at the time of asking the question.

By “figuring out” why you chose your particular city, you get to experience the brain’s process for making you feel like you consciously make decisions — backward rationalization. The emotional limbic system in your brain (a largely subconscious system) makes the decision for you, and then you try to figure out why it did that.

This process feels like decision making when really it’s more like simple observation. You watched yourself make a decision and then told yourself a story to help the decision make sense. Doesn’t it just blow your mind? This realization ruined an entire week for me when I first became aware because it made me feel like I was my own slave, hypnotized and manipulated by my own subconscious.

That common advice instructing you to control your thoughts is based on an illusion, a misbelief. Your thoughts are not a process of decision making; they are simply the presentation made to you by your subconscious mind after it has already made a decision. Thoughts are like a PowerPoint slideshow telling you what is happening behind the scenes in your mind. Trying to control your thoughts is like arguing with a presenter about their PowerPoint slides; they’ve already designed the presentation and made the decisions. It cannot be undone.

When you think you have “fixed” a thought, this is still a subconscious process where you are made to believe that you consciously changed the thoughts. “You” didn’t; the dark side of your brain did. At least, this appears to be the most rational explanation according to today’s science. I remain open-minded about what more we will discover about the nature of consciousness.

The third and final point I want to make is about the very nature of thought. I believe that because thought appears to us to be the “loudest” sensation inside our heads, the sensation closest to our source of conscious awareness, we often mistake it for being the most accurate. Simply put, we believe our thoughts and “listen” to them, more than we do other sensations.

Yet our thoughts are so subjective and distant from reality-based evidence that to believe a thought is the equivalent of believing a three-year-old child's explanation about the monsters under his bed. You're listening to the fanciful and often directionless rantings of your mind and saying, "Mmm, good point, sounds about right." Notice how often you believe your thoughts, those endless stories in your head explaining the world to you, without questioning the truthfulness of them.

We humans are capable of counterfactual thinking, which is just a fancy way of saying we have the ability to make stuff up. This allows you to write screenplays, plan for your children's future, design new buildings, and cunningly engage in political struggles. Our ability to imagine alternate realities is a great asset in certain circumstances and is certainly one of the main reasons we humans are able to dominate other species on this planet, despite lacking the physical prowess of our competitors. Yet counterfactual thinking is only truly helpful if we are constantly aware of the truth — that these thoughts are not real. When we create a fiction in our minds and then believe the fiction, we are — by definition — insane. Of course, we all do this, almost all of the time… yay!

Think about how many times you've engaged in something you expected to be terrible and later thought, "Wow, it wasn't even that bad." You were originally so sure it was going to be unpleasant, and now you see clear evidence that you were wrong, yet you struggle to accept this evidence. Why? Because you believed your thoughts, instead of saying, "That's one way it might work out. We'll just have to see what happens." This is a critical dimension to the Explore phase of The 3X Model; you must always be willing to test your stories, assumptions and predictions because so often your mind is just plain wrong!

Thoughts, whether they occur to you as still or moving images, sounds, or intangible experience, are simply the "noises" your brain makes as it talks to itself. You can quite clearly conjure up thoughts that have no evidence to support them, such as "I am made of steel" or "Marshmallows rule the galaxy." These might seem like ridiculous examples, but how are they any different to the thought "I'm not good enough" or "It will be inappropriate to speak my mind right now?"

Our ability to create counterfactual thoughts immediately undermines the reliability of all thought. You cannot trust any one particular thought because your brain's capacity for dishonest thinking is so advanced that it's actually impossible to verify the truth of any thought. Thoughts are no more important or real than any other sensation such as sound, sight and touch. So to treat thought differently than, say, itchiness, or elevator music, is misguided and irrational… not to mentioned devastatingly unhelpful.

To wrap it all together, the pursuit of controlling your thoughts is like trying to tame a wild beast that doesn't even exist. It's a pointless and painful endeavor that can only be achieved for very short bursts of time, usually with a negative consequence later (such as how using positive affirmations can undermine motivation once you stop believing them). The key to managing thoughts is to actually see them for what they are — background noise. Your real decisions and motivational reasons for action are controlled by a largely subconscious part of the brain, and allowing that part to function in a healthy way, by using conscious awareness to give the brain feedback on how to live more by your values, is the true secret to "controlling" your thoughts.

Challenge: Watch this video on defusion — the art of distancing yourself from thoughts: http://www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/stop-discouraging-yourself-eliminate-negative-thoughts/

Myth #5: Impress Other People

A lot of confidence advice out there seems to be based on the idea that confidence is some sort of performance ranking, measured externally, and you are only counted as "confident" if you gain results and recognition. This is where we see people who give advice being skewed and misguided by their own lack of confidence, possibly without even realizing it. Any advice telling you to do something that requires the approval of others destines you to fail because the opinions of others are completely out of your control. It's only a matter of time before someone hates you for no rational reason and there's nothing you can do to change their mind.

This myth is an extrapolation of myth #2 (Look Your Best). I singled that out earlier as a separate point because I felt the need to address the unhelpful pursuit of aesthetic acceptance. But it goes far beyond that. Often, confidence-guides talk about the effect you can have on other people. And nowhere is this focused on more obsessively and carefully than the world of the Pick Up Artist.

For those of you not aware (where have you been?), there is an entire multi-million-dollar industry aimed at helping men learn how to manipulate social dynamics in order to influence women into having sex with them. I used to wholeheartedly support this industry, and I still credit Neil Strauss' book The Game with helping me to emerge from my victim mindset. I learned some powerful and helpful things during my time as a wannabe PUA (Pick Up Artist). However, I eventually left the "game" behind because I noticed there was something wrong with it.

It is completely founded on seeking validation from others. Or as John Cooper, author of Game Over and founder of Social Heartistry, likes to say — ACQUISITION. Any system based on taking from others in order to reduce the psychological sensation of missing something, of loss, is doomed. You cannot fill a tank that has holes in the bottom; it will continue to leak out endlessly, trapping you in an endless search for more outcomes. This is not what I mean by the term Exploration.

Through the use of careful strategy, tactics and often deception, I was able to essentially learn how to make people like me. I was even able to manufacture attraction in women so that they would desire me and do things I wanted them to do. At first, I thoroughly enjoyed this experience, partly because over many years of being consistently rejected by women I had developed a misogynist mindset. I told myself, "They deserve to be manipulated. They made it difficult in the first place." By indulging in "game" tactics and using psychological truisms to influence women, I was finally getting revenge for my perceived mistreatment in the hands of women. As you can imagine, this did not exactly lead me to a healthy place.

I started to distance myself from this whole industry when a couple of disturbing things happened. The most obvious was the guilt I felt in actually succeeding with these tactics. I remember one night I teased a girl all night long, not engaging in anything beyond shallow playful banter for hours, and eventually she came home with me. When the time came to "close the deal," I actually declined. It felt so wrong to me, like she had been convinced to sleep with a fictitious guy I had created, a strategy that was designed to manipulate her at a subconscious level. Frankly, I felt like a con artist, a borderline rapist.

This was confusing for me because the whole industry sells itself on the promise to transform you into a confident guy. The consumers look up to the teachers like big brothers, blindly following advice and worshiping the supposedly successful ones. I felt like I was receiving mixed messages. On one hand, I was told that was what confident people did, and on the other I felt guilty, fake and more of a people-pleaser than ever before. It was only when I started meeting and interacting with these so-called gurus of confidence that I realized they were still needy, insecure, and prone to

validation-seeking through avoiding rejection at all costs. Yes, some of them got laid a lot. But were they actually confident?

The Pick Up industry is not the only source of misinformation about confidence through external validation. There is a general theme of "fake it 'til you make it" running throughout many reputable confidence-building organizations. Many career-support services will focus on how you look and pretend to feel in a job interview, using the false presentation of confidence to impress or influence people. There are coaches and self-help gurus who encourage people to measure themselves by how much money they make or how "happy" they feel.

These stem from external validation sources, which means you cannot guarantee the outcome in any situation. If your confidence is attached to how positively people react to you, how much money you make, or how many girls you sleep with, you are simply waiting for disappointment. Confidence is not achieved through external validation, at least not in any permanent or consistent way, and setting yourself up like this means you have to keep seeking that external validation forever just to feel good.

I found out that many of the gurus in the Pick Up industry still approach dozens of women every week, despite already being romantically engaged with numerous women consistently. To me this shows a dependence pattern, seeking validation regularly like a drug user seeks their highs, not just from women but from their adoring students and fans. Frequent validation-seeking is not a definition of confidence in my opinion.

From what I see, after emotional shame the number one barrier to self-confidence and authenticity is the desire to please other people. Occasionally I'll meet someone I'm convinced does not care what other people think and has confidence issues for other reasons, but this is extremely rare. Even hipsters, protesters and others who appear to go against pleasing people are still often trying to get recognition. They want their peers to cheer them on and their enemies to validate their existence. No matter how you do it, if you measure your self-worth by the reactions of other people, either positive or negative, you don't stand a chance at long-term self-confidence.

Challenge: Carry a notepad or something similar with you for an entire week and write down each example of behavior you see yourself engage in that is motivated by seeking validation from others. For example, I noticed myself offering to help people who didn't need it or ask for it, and I would often reply to emails immediately because I wanted the other person to think I was efficient. Try to become aware of your reasons for why you consistently do what you do.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF CONFIDENCE

Now that we've addressed the most misguiding of the advice out there, let's explore the key points of what confidence actually is and look at how a consistent state of self-confidence can be achieved.

Once, during a discussion with my Brojo community, they asked me what I thought were the key elements to confidence. I told them that my top three, in no particular order, were (a) regularly choosing emotional discomfort through valued living, (b) self-reflection through journaling daily, and (c) managing expectations through grounding my focused attention in the present moment.

I realized, of course, that just because these were my top three did not mean these would be the same for others, so I've put together a list based on what I've seen work consistently through hundreds of coaching clients, my own experiences and tests, and my research into the most

successful and charismatic people in the world (by my own judgment). See which of these feel most intuitively "right" for you.

Acceptance — Making Your Peace with Reality

Whether it's accepting yourself or accepting external reality, the ability to come to terms with — and be grateful for — whatever is true becomes a major keystone in the development of consistent confidence. The Release phase of The 3X Model is where acceptance is focused on most (covered in the third book of the trilogy). We look at who we are and how our lives are going, without trying to judge or assess, and simply recognize everything as being our current version of the Truth.

This does not negate the need for constant improvement, as we live in a world that clearly favors adaptation. Self-acceptance is not about staying the same because "you're OK just the way you are." It's more about simply realizing who you are and what is going on in any given moment, as often as possible, before deciding what changes you'd like to make.

It's about recognizing what is working well and what is helpful, as well as what is not. We can learn to accept failure, mistakes and setbacks as a natural — and indeed crucial — part of everyday life. The only way we can adapt and change to become more successful is if we fail. So failure starts to become something we welcome and congratulate ourselves for, rather than something to be ashamed of.

Your ability to think counterfactually is helpful for planning and anticipating a short distance into the future. To balance the potential harm that comes from mistakenly believing in these predictions, we must regularly check back in with reality and adapt to it. Thinking "I should be better than this by now" does not help you maintain confidence or build authenticity, whereas recognizing the truth — "I would like to be better, but right now I am at this level, which is more than yesterday and as good as I can be right now" — encourages greater motivation and, ultimately, more success.

Because everyone has a slightly different perspective on reality, you cannot rely on others to decide what your reality is. You must curiously weigh all the evidence and decide for yourself, which is impossible to do if you willfully ignore and avoid evidence. I know the fantasy in your head seems more appealing than your real life, but you cannot make the fantasy come true by thinking about it and wishing it was true. (No matter what the Law of Attraction enthusiasts claim, there is absolutely no valid scientific evidence supporting the concept!)

There is an amazing and beautiful reality waiting for you to join in once you're done with your fantasy. True confidence requires being boldly and openly accepting of the real world.

Internal Validation — Measuring Yourself Based on Valued Living

People who want you to think they are confident often proclaim they "don't care what you think." But if that was true, they wouldn't have said it! We all get lost in the opinions of others, yet for the most part these are completely fictional. You see someone roll their eyes and assume they don't like you, when in fact they could simply be trying to remove an eye-floaty or more likely are reacting to a fiction they made up about you.

Because it's so hard for most people to express themselves with complete honesty — removing all assumptions, misbeliefs and biases — feedback will always be an entirely subjective measure. Only a

computer could give you relatively accurate feedback, and even then it would need to be programmed by a biased human in the first place.

Any time a living human being gives you feedback, you are getting a one-off, in-the-moment perspective — at best, an opinion influenced heavily by their personality, life experiences, current mood, distracting thoughts, temperature… the list goes on forever. In the end, while gaining alternative perspectives will be helpful to determining a fuller understanding of the truth, any one person's opinion or reaction to you is basically useless when it comes to measuring your worthiness.

A confident person may care what you think, but they do not use what you think as a measure of how good they are as a person. A confident person understands that the only person who has enough evidence and insight to judge them is themselves. Everyone else is guessing, assuming and probably talking a load of shit. But of course the advice of "don't care what other people think" is unhelpful and impossible to apply in real life because it is simply an anti-action. So there must be a more helpful approach than trying to not care what others think of you.

We have the power to choose what we focus on and, thankfully, we can only focus on a single thing at any given time. So if we take our focus away from other people's opinions and redirect it toward a different system of measurement, we can effectively stop caring what other people think. Instead of allowing fear to automatically decide how we are measured, we can enable ourselves to create a new measurement system.

In practical terms, this is where journaling becomes important. You need to actively and objectively track how well you are living by your values. Almost every day I write in my journal. Here's a real-life entry of my assessment of my ability to be honest.

"Told [friend] via Facebook message that I don't want to do [attend an event]. That was a bit weak, but she kind of forced my hand. Deep down I know I should have said it in person, but I can let myself off the hook a little as I have had no issue being up front with her in the past."

Because you will be connected strongly with the original unhelpful system of measurement (other people's opinions), you must consciously and manually engage in a different system consistently, and for quite some time, before it replaces the old one. You'll see; it's worth the effort!

Ultimately you cannot control other people's opinions, you cannot guarantee results or outcomes, and you cannot accurately predict how things will turn out. External factors all have one thing in common — you cannot control them. There are also some internal factors that are difficult to control because they are triggered subconsciously, meaning you only become aware of them after they have started. These include initial emotional reactions, beliefs, and biases. Measuring yourself on how well you can control any of these things takes the power out of your conscious hands as well.

In the end, there is only one element of your life that you have true control over — whether you live by your values. Therefore, any measurement of how good you are as a person or how worthy you consider yourself to be can only be rationally applied to valued living. The self-worth measurement system you use is yours to create as you see fit; all I'm saying is that the only logical focus it should have is to measure how well your actions align with your values.

Varied Emotional Experience — Expanding Your Range

We have been taught that success is all about experiencing a limited range of so-called positive emotions. We believe someone is successful if they are happy all of the time. Unfortunately, like air-brushed models in magazines, these people are an illusion. No one is really happy all of the time and, even if they were, the monotony of having only a single emotion would probably drive them bat-shit crazy.

Imagine if all emotions were equally important, contributing as a whole to your enjoyment of life and sense of fulfilment. As shame-researcher Brene Brown suggests in her famous TED talk on vulnerability, you cannot numb one emotion without numbing them all (http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability). Emotions come as a package deal. There will never be a time when you can select the ones you favor and discard or suppress the others forever. If you want happiness you must welcome sadness. If you want curiosity you must welcome boredom. If you want peace you must welcome anger.

Having a range of emotional experiences in a healthy way will create a rich and meaningful life. Many religions and other restrictive virtue-based authorities have you believing that you should be ashamed of natural human emotion, robbing you of the ability to enjoy them all. Through The 3X Model, we see how each separate emotional state can actually serve you helpfully if you learn to listen to your own body. Anger gives you the motivation and courage to stand up for yourself. Sadness helps you appreciate what is good in life and teaches you empathy and compassion. Boredom drives you to try new things. Confusion makes you seek the answers. They are all there to help.

A simple question I ask myself is, “What is my brain trying to tell me?”

I start with the assumption that my emotional reaction is helpful, that it is trying to guide me toward something better, and to harness this I need to stop and listen to it accurately. I need to be careful because an emotional reaction can often be fear-based, and I need to make sure I know what the value-based action is. I don’t just follow the avoidant and automatic fear response. Even being afraid is helpful; you are being given the opportunity to be brave, which will expand your comfort zone and make you proud of yourself, without requiring an outcome or result.

Defusion from Thought — Becoming the Observer

Academic and philosopher Eckhart Tolle is one of my top influences in terms of learning how to manage your mind to be present, grounded, and base your perception on objectivity (as much as humanly possible).

Tolle says that stress is “wanting to be there when you are here.” Most of the suffering we experience is completely created by ourselves, and if that wasn’t enough of a slap in the face, we can decide to not suffer if we want! For some reason few people have chosen to develop the capability to make such a decision.

The main issue in suffering — which is the word I use for unhelpful pain — is our attachment to thoughts. More specifically, it is our tendency to focus on a single thought or pattern of thinking in an obsessive and unbalanced way. We see this tendency in its extreme form with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), where the sufferer feels forced to endure the torment of painful and repetitive thoughts, some of which are meaningless while others become an internal torture. We

humans can fictionalize the concept of hell as an external place, but in reality we create our own hell inside our minds.

I read about one girl with OCD who could not stop herself from having continuous sexual thoughts about her own mother. Of course, the more she fought these thoughts, the stronger and more repetitive they became. One day, she could no longer take it and decided to tell her mother about the thoughts. She fought overwhelming shame to courageously say to her mother, “I keep thinking about having sex with you, and it’s driving me crazy.” I can’t remember her mother’s exact response, but it was fantastic and something along the lines of, “Well, that must be annoying, my dear. Oh and don’t forget to set the table for dinner.”

Her mother was able to help her make a crucial and life-changing realization — her thoughts were not a big deal. No matter how twisted, dark and crazy our thoughts are, they are essentially untrue. They are just the noise of your brain talking to itself and have about as much validity as the discussion between a child and her imaginary friend. We can observe them without having to believe them. Thoughts are clouds passing over the sky, and the sky is unaffected by them, it simply creates the space for them to exist.

Yet perhaps because thoughts are the most ever-present sensations we experience, and maybe because they appear to be the closest in proximity to our conscious awareness (whereas something like touch starts “away” from the brain), we give them more importance than other sensations. We attach ourselves to them and zoom in on them with an internal microscope until they become so big that we cannot see anything else. For example, I will place more importance on a thought that worries about the future than I will on a painful sensation in my foot.

Throughout your life, you have had a continuously changing stream of thoughts running through your mind, so many that it’s impossible to count them, thousands or possibly even millions of separate thoughts every single day. You also regularly experience different moods and emotional sensations, which sometimes are clearly attached to specific thoughts and other times seem to have no connection that you’re consciously aware of. Added to this, your body is constantly changing physically as you age, exercise, eat and sleep, and the molecules and particles that make up your being have changed completely since your birth. Physically, you are no longer the same person you were born as.

In fact, every single second you become a completely different person, unique to anything you’ve ever been before. Think about that for a moment. You’ve never had a consistent thought, feeling or physical state. Yet it feels like someone has always been there, right? Hiding behind the scenes, peering out from behind your eyes, living somewhere inside your body but not attached to anything about you.

Despite a continuous and rarely repeated set of internal sensations, it feels like there’s a central “you” that has been calmly watching your entire life unfold. “You” were there when you were a child, “you” were there when you were a teenager, and this mysterious “You” will be there until the day you die, just watching. You are the sky where the clouds of thought pass by.

This internal version of you can even see yourself having thoughts; it can watch you think without being involved with the thoughts. One way to discover this consistent you is to identify a thought and say it out loud, e.g., “I am thinking about an apple.” Which part of you said that? There was one part having a thought about an apple, and then there was something else watching this thought process take place, like the audience at a play, who can speak out and identify the thought without being it.

For you to be able to say, “I am having a thought…” shows that a part of you is able to watch your thoughts occur. You would not be able to say something like this if you were your thoughts; this part of you must therefore be separate from thoughts and able to observe them without being attached to them.

Some people call this the Mind’s Eye, ACT therapy calls it The Observing Self, Eckhart Tolle calls it the Observer, and there are millions of other names for it. Some neuroscientists and philosophers are even starting to find evidence to suggest that each hemisphere of the brain has a separate “mind,” and the observing mind is the right hemisphere, devoid of language and therefore only capable of watching you live your life.

I prefer to think of it as the man in the lighthouse.

Imagine a lighthouse sitting on a rocky peninsula, beaming out to sea. The lighthouse can see the entire ocean, with a full 360-degree view. From within the lighthouse, you could scope out the entire horizon, you could zoom in on a single wave, or anything in between.

This is what we do with thoughts and with reality; we either zoom in to focus on a single small point or we expand our awareness to scan all of reality. Our field of vision can be limited. Once we zoom in, we lose awareness of what surrounds the point we are focused on and that small point becomes our entire reality, like when you get lost in thought while driving and “suddenly” arrive at your house with no memory of the drive itself. When we attach ourselves to a thought (which can be caused by trying to fight against the thought), we lose perspective and the thought becomes our entire world.

You’ll see this happen in an argument where one person becomes attached to a single point made by the other, and loses awareness of the overall topic being argued about, escalating the conflict. For example, your partner might be trying to express that she is frustrated by her perception of you, which is that you don’t care as much about the relationship as she does. As she expresses this, she might say something like “you never do the dishes”. You then proceed to blast off half-cocked to point out all the times you did the dishes, rather than expanding your awareness to see that the dishes really have nothing to do with why she’s upset.

Defusion is the process where we consciously zoom out, becoming gradually aware of what else the person in the lighthouse can see. We can take the time to consciously recognize when we attach or fuse to a single thought, a meaningless wave in the ocean, and this can enable us to zoom out again without resisting or fighting the thought. We simply accept that it is actually just a small part of a much larger picture.

Let’s say I am feeling nervous before going on stage. I can zoom in on the idea of “stage fright,” and notice that my heart is racing, my prepared speech has been forgotten, and there is a prediction-type thought of public embarrassment cycling repetitively in my mind. With defusion, I can start to notice what else is happening. I feel sensations beyond nervousness, such as an itchiness in my scalp. I notice the sights, smells and sounds of my environment. I expand my search, through curiosity, to find out what else is happening. I don’t fight against nervousness. I accept it and welcome everything else beyond it as well. In doing so, the nervousness seems less overwhelming and is reduced to a mere set of physical and mental sensations, none of which I can’t handle.

When you can learn to see thoughts for what they are — just thoughts — you can start to accept more of reality, reducing the size and importance of the single thought. It’s hard to become obsessed with a single thought when you are also taking notice of what you feel, taste, see, smell and hear. When you zoom out to notice more than your thoughts, you can experience the

peacefulness and freedom that comes with grounding yourself in the present moment through enlarging your awareness to capture as much stimuli as you can.

This process can be practiced through mindfulness meditation. I have prepared a pre-recorded guide you can use here: www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/guided-mindfulness-meditation/.

Internal Locus of Control — Taking Responsibility for Your Life

When I research confident people, this factor is so consistently obvious that I consider it to be beyond debate (which may be a limiting belief on my part, of course). Without exception it seems, every single person I have thought of as confident has this one trait in common. They take responsibility for their life. No matter what happens to them, no matter what hand they are dealt, they accept that it is for them to deal with. They see themselves as completely autonomous — responsible for making the most of whatever life throws at them.

This is not the same as blaming yourself for things going wrong.

It's important that we distinguish between responsibility and blame because while these look the same, they are actually polar opposites when talking about confidence. People often think that when they blame themselves for hardships and failures they are taking responsibility. Anyone who has ever been to an office meeting knows what the blame-game looks like — a pointless search for a focal point of "fault," which lets everyone else off the hook.

Confident people do not place blame. They take responsibility. The difference is about where the locus of control is situated. Confident people see a problem and decide that the locus of control is within them, represented by their ability to take action in order to remedy the issue. Basically, taking responsibility is deciding to address the problem, looking forward to determine how it can be solved and deciding to be the person who facilitates that solution.

Placing blame is more about finding a culprit to heap shame upon, to place the locus of control on a perceived external concept. Even when you blame yourself, you are essentially placing the locus of control away from you as a concept. You have separated the part of you that caused the problem, as you see it, which effectively removes any power and responsibility you could have. It's basically the same as blaming someone else, only this time it's your past self.

In simple terms, blame is saying, "Who caused this?" while responsibility is saying, "What am I going to do about it?" Confident people move forward while the insecure sit around whingeing.

One thing that absolutely catapulted my career progression when I was working with Corrections was taking responsibility for problems. Like many government departments, there was so much fear about being found at fault that whenever a problem occurred most people would expend a majority of their resources pinning the blame on someone else. This frustrated me so often, until eventually one day I just started saying, "Fuck it, give it to me, I'll do it." It was interesting to note the relief with which many people passed the buck to me, only to later be disappointed because I was being promoted over them for this very reason.

Confident people ask, "What can I do about it?" and have no real interest figuring out whose fault it was. Perhaps intuitively they share an understanding that a) blame serves no helpful purpose once you remove the relief that comes from attaching guilt to something external, and b) blame is entirely untruthful because there is no such thing as pure cause and effect.

When fault is laid, no one really benefits in the longer term. The problem still exists, only now people get to feel bad about themselves on top of it, which reduces their productivity and problem-solving capabilities. Cause and effect is a myth because there are so many billions of variables that contribute to a single situation that it would be impossible to draw a line saying one caused the outcome. Blame is always a lie.

You see this in sporting games. The final whistle is about to blow and the star player is all lined up to make the winning shot. But she misses. The crowd and commentators blame her for losing the game. But what about everything else that contributed to the score? There were the other players' attempts to score, the other team's ability to defend themselves, the weather, the mood and temperature, the effect of the crowd, the childhoods of every person in the arena, and on and on and on. It's impossible to say one thing caused the outcome. Confident people simply know this line of thought is a massive waste of time and energy, and they know blame is merely a temptation to avoid taking responsibility. Living by values, confident people choose to forgo this temptation and instead choose to face life like a powerful beast.

This is important to understand. Often people feel badly when they try to accept responsibility for their lives because they are actually just blaming themselves for things outside their control, particularly when they look at successes and failures, good times and trauma. Take a rape victim, for example, are we to expect them to take responsibility for being raped? No, that's taking blame. Taking responsibility is about choosing to go to trauma therapy, moving on with life, and even helping others who have suffered through similar experiences. Blame is about the past; responsibility is about the present and the future.

You are not to blame for what has happened in your life, even your own behavior, because it is impossible to isolate a person from their genetics, upbringing and societal influences. If you're to blame for what you've done, then everyone else must be held to account for your behavior as well, because in some way they have all influenced you through the world you live in.

However, it is definitely up to you to take responsibility for what you do next, because no one else can do that for you. You cannot change the past, but you can choose to learn from it. You cannot take back what was done by you or done to you, but you can choose to use these experiences to promote your development.

I look back at being a Nice Guy. This used to cause me a ton of regret, guilt and frustration. Why didn't I do something different? Because I simply couldn't have. Life played out the way it did and that's all there is to it. A billion different influences led me to become a Nice Guy, and trying to figure out which one to blame it all on is a pointless waste of energy. Instead, I ask myself, "How can I benefit from that experience? What good can I do in the world now that I've learned those lessons?"

Instead of falling for cause and effect bias like everyone else does, start thinking about what life would be like if you were to take responsibility for your behavior and decisions. Imagine how good it would feel to be powerful rather than helpless. Being powerful is not about having resources, skills or advantages, it's simply about choosing to do what you can with what is available to you. A person tied to a chair can still be powerful if they choose to make the most of that experience. This is how confident people see the world — limitless power within a limited environment.

As a quick practical tip, write down all the things you want to complain about. Next to each item on this list, note what you have direct control over (e.g. if I write a complaint like "My friend is keeping secrets from me", next to it I would write "I only have direct control over how much I challenge him about this"). Decide whether you care about each item enough to change it, or whether you're

willing to let it continue as it is. For each item you wish to change, modify your behavior according to what you decided you have control over (using the previous example, if I cared about this I could call my friend and say “Hey I think you’re keeping secrets from me, let’s talk about this,” but I wouldn’t expect them to respond). This is taking responsibility.

Focus – Developing Superior Attention Management

One mistake Law of Attraction enthusiasts appear to make is to confuse control with focus. They think that if you focus on wanting something badly enough, you will make it happen; this is actually attempted control, not focus. Control is about an outcome; focus is a process. A much more rational and empirical way to look at this phenomenon is to understand that what you put your focus and energy toward will change the most because your behavior in this area will change the most. And herein lies an exciting opportunity. If you can learn how to focus your attention and transform this into actions, you will be able to decide which areas of your life improve the most.

There is no such thing as multitasking. It is a complete myth. You can only focus your primary point of attention on a single priority at any given moment. Yet it often feels like we are doing multiple tasks at once, like watching television while we eat. What happens is that your focus of attention flickers between tasks so quickly that it can feel like you are simultaneously engaged in all of them. This is an illusion. You are actually only doing one at a time, and of most concern is the lag time between these flickers of attention. Those nanoseconds add up to hours over the course of a week, and add up to many months and even years over the course of a lifetime.

I ran an impromptu experiment with a team I was managing. I noticed they were going in and out of their email inboxes all day long, and when I sat down to observe them work I also noticed that most of the time this flickering served no helpful purpose. They would often stop in the middle of an important task, read emails, do nothing about those emails, and then return to their original task. This accomplished nothing while adding the stress of additional information (“I must get back to Gladys about her email after this”) and causing the staff member to have to take time to refocus on the task they were originally engaged in.

I told my staff they were only allowed to check their emails once per day, having been recently inspired by Tim Ferriss’ The 4-hour Workweek. The results? Each staff member saved, on average, four hours per week. Without any reduction in productivity, they were able to create an extra half-day per week. This means those four hours were likely being completely lost in the act of switching between tasks for no reason. This was just emails. Imagine how many hours you are losing every week — and how many weeks you are losing every year — just flickering pointlessly between tasks.

This represents what we all do every single day. While trying to do one task, our focus of attention flickers to others tasks, physical sensations, thoughts, noises and a myriad of other distractions. This is well demonstrated by Facebook and its ability to suck you in when all you wanted to do was check your messages. Half an hour and three pointless articles later, you’re trying to remember what you originally logged in for… and what the hell you were in the middle of before that. And you still haven’t checked your messages!

Think about it again. If my staff lost four hours per week just in the tiny act of checking emails, imagine how many hours each of us are losing altogether in pointless attention flickering. Each day you flick between hundreds of different distractions. I have people complain to me about how they can’t find the time to start their own business, improve their social life, or go to the gym. Yet without

fail I can find time where they use energy pointlessly by scrolling through social media, watching television programs that bring no benefit to their life, or cleaning things that don't need cleaning.

Mindfulness is the art of learning how to manage these distractions and focus for longer periods of time. Things like Facebook actually condition you to be distracted by training you to flick your attention between different posts and their topics many times per minute. Television advertising has a similar effect. Becoming mindful is about learning how to simplify your attention by bringing it back to the task at hand, more often and sooner, each time you try it.

Many people give up on mindfulness training, such as meditation, because they don't feel they are doing it right. They have been led to believe that mindfulness is some sort of pure focus without distraction or thought. Not quite. Rather than becoming obsessed with complete and "pure" focus, which is probably not possible thanks to the subconscious mind throwing thoughts at you all the time, you can instead learn how to identify distractions and return from them quicker over time.

Try this for a week: Make every task you do epic. If you're washing the dishes, make it the best dish-washing experience of your life. Wash the hell out of those dishes. Focus your attention on every stroke of the brush, the temperature of the water, the minute specks of crap stuck between the tines of the fork. And every time you get distracted — which will happen often — simply notice this is happening and return your focus to your epic dish washing. You can do this with eating, walking, driving, showering and almost any other "mundane" task, to build a confident level of focus.

Health — Maintain Your Mind's Vehicle

We often separate the mind and body as if they are somehow different entities, like a passenger traveling inside a vehicle. This is enhanced by the concept of sight. The mind feels like it is looking out at the world from behind your eye sockets, giving you the impression that you are driving your body like a car or a boat. This is another illusion and sometimes a fairly harmful one at that.

The truth is that everything contained within your skin significantly impacts everything else in there. I have a genetic deficiency that makes me more susceptible to alcohol damage than most (not awesome, by the way), and due to a party lifestyle in my early twenties, my liver got inflamed. This led to my stomach becoming inflamed as well, causing acid reflux and an annoying pain in my side. Being a man, I naturally let this continue for a good eighteen months before deciding to see a doctor about it. The main reason I went is because the pain was starting to affect my mood, distract my focus, and interfere with my already delicate sleeping patterns. Everything was linked together; nothing in my body was able to remain unaffected by my inflamed liver, not even my mind.

As we become an increasingly academic species, many of us are starting to seriously neglect our bodies. Confident people do not. People with high self-worth recognize the importance of maintaining the machine that is their body, within whatever limitations they have, and they understand that the body's condition will have a massive impact on their mind. When you are physically healthy, you are more likely to be mentally healthy, and vice versa. It's really quite simple. You may have disorders, diseases and disabilities, but there will still always be a healthiest option available when you are making decisions. You're not completely disadvantaged.

Some self-development enthusiasts only read and watch videos, taking no physical action to improve the state of their bodies and maintain their machinery. Others only focus on physical health and become so attached to it that they place all their self-worth in the hands of the physical performance and appearance. I have seen neither of these extremes do well in the long term with

regard to confidence. I've seen ripped body builders lose control due to the rage they hold inside about their intellectual insecurities, and I've seen genius-level academics become ill and depressed due to lack of nutrition, exercise and sunlight.

Your mind is part of your body, therefore anyone seriously interested in personal development must include priority management of their body. Unless you are so restricted by such physical barriers that you cannot move (e.g., being tetraplegic) you have no excuse for not taking care of your body. My girlfriend had a job taking care of a paraplegic man who cannot grip with his fingers. It may seem like he has no control over his health. Yet he requests cigarettes and alcohol and often refuses to go outside. He has healthier options than that, which would align more with values, so his disability is not an excuse for his self-neglect.

Confident people take care of themselves to live by the value of respect. How can you hope to respect yourself if you're sick, tired, weak, and inflexible, yet not making an effort to remedy this? Of course you may be stricken with an unavoidable illness that weakens you, but how hard you participate in your recovery still depends on decisions you make about effort. Show me any disease or disability, and I'll find you someone who has it and is still able to conquer their world (probably).

It's not that hard. Yes, there are some conflicting messages about what it means to be healthy, to the point of baffling us all. Vegan versus paleo, strength conditioning versus cardio, no fat versus good fat. It's all a bit of a mystery. And that's why you need to get curious and start testing different ideas for yourself. (Explore options, Engage in the most likely choice, Release yourself to measure the results, and then repeat.)

Choosing Discomfort — Inure Yourself to Pain

Many of us are addicted to comfort. We behave like heroin junkies when it comes to getting as comfortable as possible. We lie to ourselves and others to convince ourselves that being comfortable is a good thing, like when we talk about staying in our shit job as part of a "Five Year Plan" to create a comfortable income.

We make completely irrational decisions that can only be explained by an addiction to comfort. We delay quitting, telling ourselves that it's not the right time and that we can quit whenever we want to, we just don't want to yet, because of this, that and the other. We say things like, "I'll introduce myself to him tomorrow. I can't do it now because he's speaking to someone." We choose to binge-watch television even though we want to be healthy, alert, and successful.

Confident people understand growth is painful and therefore pain is necessary. They understand that uncomfortable sensations inside the body and mind are only sensations, not instructions or demands. Confident people realize that if they choose to endure small amounts of discomfort on a regular basis, with a plan in mind, they will continuously grow and develop to be more comfortable within themselves. Being uncomfortable is the true path to satisfaction, while being comfortable is the true path to suffering.

What is discomfort? Discomfort is simply any internal sensation that you would not categorize as pleasurable. For some it may be anxiety, fear or confusion. For others it might be loss of control, frustration with things going wrong, or having no plan. Some people even feel pain when they experience happiness and excitement — particularly those who thrive on drama. Whatever your pain sensations are, choosing to experience them in order to live by your values is what we mean

when we say, “Choose discomfort to build confidence.” Conversely, when you choose to breach your integrity in order to escape painful sensations, you are working against building confidence.

Courage doesn’t really lead someone to choose discomfort; wisdom does. You will have discomfort in your life one way or another, even if you are cowardly. There is no choice about that, and wise people know this to be true. You can hide in a protective bubble for a long time, but that will not stop the pain coming your way. Avoiding pain now, such as the discomfort of facing fear, leads to a much greater suffering later on when you come to regret your life and feel no sense of purpose. Choosing to remain comfortable is not just cowardly, it is insane. It makes no rational sense and therefore can only be classified as irrational self-sabotage.

Let me paint a picture to show what this looks like in real life.

Let’s say you feel uncomfortable being single. Loneliness and isolation make you feel anxious, unsafe and unloved. Yet the idea of going out to make new friends, while having high standards about who you spend time with, fills you with dread; you don’t believe you’re worthy of choosing other people and instead believe you should be grateful for whomever you can get. These are your discomfort pains.

Because you don’t want to experience these pains, you start to sacrifice your integrity. You smile and laugh at jokes that aren’t funny because you want to be seen as easygoing and playful. You bite your tongue when someone says something that offends your beliefs because you don’t want to be the “cause” of someone else feeling hurt. You allow that guy to go a bit further sexually than you were truly comfortable with because you believe he will like you more. You feign interest in her job so she will feel safe enough to let you get into her pants.

This leads you to get into a relationship with the first person who shows a dedicated interest in you. Sure, a few things about the person seem not quite right, but they only bother you a little at first. Maybe they seem a bit petty. Maybe they don’t take your passions quite as seriously as you do. Maybe they don’t seem to invest as much in the connection as you. This is all acceptable to you because you believe being single is so much more painful.

Fast-forward ten years. You’re now married and have children with this person. There is no love left in the relationship, just a comfortable pattern of mutual diplomacy whereby you go about your daily routine as if you’re a pair of programmed robots. What little sexual tension once existed has long since died and been replaced with a complacent platonic boredom. You feel trapped in this mediocrity, unable to leave because of the investment of time, energy and children, and unable to stay because of the bitter dissatisfaction that eats at your soul, day after day after miserable day. You fantasize constantly about escape and drown in envy toward others for having the relationships you wish you had.

This is the difference between pain and suffering. If you had only been able to accept the pain of being single long enough to allow your confidence and independence to grow, long enough to figure out who you really are and what you really want in a partner, you might have found a truly deep and meaningful connection. That chosen pain would have been an investment in your self-confidence and authenticity. Instead, you took the quick-fix, instant gratification option, and now you are tortured with the regret of your fear-based decision.

This story is based on many real life case studies from clients I work with. It clearly demonstrates why you must learn how to be OK with painful emotional discomfort. It is but a small price to pay for the glorious existence that grows from developing confident authenticity. Confident people

understand that it's better to be single than in an unfulfilling relationship; it's better to be unemployed than in a soul-crushing job; it's better to be tired from exercise than to rot snugly on the sofa; it's better to feel natural anxiety than it is to binge on sugar and drugs. Most of all, they understand that no matter how hard it is to live by your values, it's always better than the suffering that comes from continually not living by them.

Each time it gets a little bit easier. I can clearly remember the first time I initiated a conversation with a stranger and told her the truth about why I was coming up to say hi (because I thought she was gorgeous and I wanted to meet her). It was one of the most uncomfortable experiences of that year. My heart was pounding so hard it deafened me, my throat was raw and dry, my hands were shaking, and my mind went blank while simultaneously racing with thoughts.

That was the first time. On the one-hundredth time I felt only a slight hesitation, nothing more, and almost every time in between I experienced massive internal rewards for being courageous. By choosing consistent discomfort, we inure ourselves to it and develop an ever-expanding threshold of pain. Those with the highest threshold are able to take the biggest risks and survive the biggest failures, and that is why they are more successful and more comfortable than you or I.

Chapter Eight: The Meaning of Life is Four Apples

I've discovered it; the meaning of life.

It is about 3:22 p.m. on Thursday the 28th of May 2015 as I write this, approximately fifteen minutes after I discovered the meaning of life. I have just finished a session with David, a client of mine, and he asked for my thoughts on what makes people question the meaning of life. We had an interesting discussion about the pursuit of money, longevity and love, and how we misunderstand these pursuits as meaningful.

I had a debate with my parents the other night about whether I'm a narcissist. They don't think I am because I care about others, try to have a positive impact on people, and do not meet the DSM IV criteria (my mum, a certified Doctor of Psychology, actually got her copy of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders out to prove it).

A few months back I had participated in a study about psychopaths, and to my disappointment I was not a psychopath by the measures of the scale they were testing, but I did score highly in the psychopathic levels for narcissism. My mum pointed out that I'm just too darn nice to meet the grade.

Why do I bring up this pointless bit of trivia? Because I think claiming to know the meaning of life is sufficiently grandiose to qualify me for narcissism, don't you? So here it is; the meaning of life, in all its glory, is, without a doubt, simply this:

Four Apples.

Allow me to explain…

SCIENCE

The reason I love science as a system only became clear to me after that fateful conversation with David, the client I mentioned earlier. Actually, to be more specific, I always knew why I loved science but I had never before put it into words.

I love science because it claims to be able to do one thing, and one thing only — ask questions. Most other belief systems, on the other hand, tend to all have one thing in common that separates them from science; they claim to know the answers. Whether it's organized religion, Law of Attraction, veganism, or Pick Up Artistry, they all have that in common — a complete almost unquestioning faith in their final answer. They have allowed no room for growth.

Penn Jillette, the famous magician from the illusionist twosome Penn and Teller, is quoted as saying, "If every trace of any single religion were wiped out and nothing were passed on, it would never be created exactly that way again. There might be some other nonsense in its place, but not that exact nonsense. If all of science were wiped out, it would still be true and someone would find a way to figure it all out again."

As he so eloquently puts it, science stays the same no matter what us humans think because it is simply a method for asking questions. In that sense, science can never be "wrong" because it never claims to be "right." People may use scientific findings to make claims, but science itself remains humble and simply asks another question.

What has my heavily biased support of science got to do with the meaning of life, you ask?

I've come to believe that in our search for meaning we have lost sight of something that was right in front of our noses all along. We have been looking for an answer, without realizing that the search itself is the answer. Like science, the meaning is in asking the questions, while the answers found are merely a platform from which the next question will be launched.

As described by The 3X Model, everything we know about life at this time follows a cyclical nature, from conception to life to death. From death something new forms to take the space of what was left behind. There is a never-ending cycle occurring all the time at an infinite number of levels or "fractals," from the life and death of a single organism through the life and death of an entire solar system, and everything in between. I know this might seem a bit abstract and unrelated to the point I'm trying to make, but please bear with me a moment as I try to explain.

Life for any individual thing is like a wave in the ocean. Something forms from the matter available and briefly becomes its own identifiable thing before dying to re-join the pool of matter it came from.

As Denzel Washington's character quotes in the fantastic movie The Book of Eli, "Cursed be the ground, for our sake. Both thorns and thistles shall it bring forth, for us. For out of the ground we were taken for the dust that we are… and to the dust we shall return."

What every thing has in common with every other thing is the cycle. We are all waves, due to return to the ocean when our time is up. Even something inorganic, like a mountain or a tin can, still has this cycle. Nothing is forever, and no matter is new. OK, so how does this relate to science and the point about questions being the secret to the meaning of life?

Because trying to find a single answer in a cyclical system is impossible, like trying to count the number of sides on a circle. You can say there is only one continuous side, or you could say there are an infinite number of connected sides, and you'd be hard-put to prove either answer incorrect. You can say there is a meaning to life, no meaning to life, or that meaning is a subjective experience for each individual. And again each time you'll be correct. These questions are theoretically impossible to definitively answer.

But what if the answer didn't actually matter? What if, instead of trying to find a single answer, we are always and forever just looking for the next best question? Perhaps the truth is not a destination but a journey of continual and endless discovery. A journey that has no destination, and yet paradoxically is an endless series of destinations.

Exploring is not about stopping the search because of finding an answer; it's about using every answer to pose a better question, thereby continuing the endless search. How this relates to confidence I'll explore a little later in this chapter. For now let's just move forward with the suggestion that searching for meaning is the point in and of itself.

CURIOSITY

The difficulty with testing this idea is that like any other search for the meaning of life, there is ultimately no way to verify it. There is no benchmark or set reality to measure ideas such as these against. Which is entirely the point I'm trying to make; we can never know the final answer, so we must look to the questions for meaning. (You can see the influence Socratic philosophy has on my thinking here.)

Imagine if we did in fact find the final answer, the one thing that defined life and the Universe and everything all at once. Would we even want to know? What would follow that understanding? We can look to religion to see what happens when the final answer has supposedly been found. We can see if confidence and satisfaction can be found on that path.

Let's take Christianity and Islam for example. These two popular religions have one main concept in common. They both have all of the "answers" contained in a single book. There is no secondary material, addendum or supplements, and the personal translations of each reader are rather dubious (I've watched a lot of First Light, the New Zealand Christian channel). The Christian Bible and the Islamic Koran have everything you need to know, apparently. There is an absolute scarcity of searching because the answers have already been decided, for eternity. And what is the consequence of following a final answer belief system such as these?

The death of Curiosity.

When you're watching a magician, the magic dies once you figure out how the trick works. The curiosity thrilled you, the mystery, the pursuit of the answer, not the answer itself. Something dies when you hear that the woman being sawed in half was actually two different women safely contained in separate boxes, and a kind of grief can be experienced in the light of this revelation.

When watching interviews with scientists about their discoveries, sometimes I can't help but think I hear a note of sadness, as if the fun is over. Maybe that's my confirmation bias playing out, but who knows? To me, when the magic of discovery is over there is a melancholy I experience, as I come to realize that the mystery and search has come to an end. I feel like something deep in the core of my brain thrives on curiosity, and that same thing grieves after a discovery is made. First comes the thrill of insight and understanding, but then comes a kind of "what next?" feeling.

I noticed this grief when I was first learning to play guitar, in particular when I was learning Stairway to Heaven by Led Zeppelin. When I first heard the song it was magical to me. I couldn't even comprehend what the guitar was doing. But over time I learned how to play it, piece by piece, and the once magical sounds became an understandable progression of notes, scales, and chords. The magic was explained and something important was lost forever. I can never hear that song with the same sense of wonder again because now I know how to play it.

However, music is like science and never has a final answer. Each discovery leads to further curiosity. While the magic of Stairway to Heaven was taken away from me forever, further questions were immediately raised that generated more curiosity. How do you make up a song like that? What other Led Zeppelin songs am I now capable of playing? How could I use those same chords and progressions in a different way? Finding the "answer" to Stairway to Heaven was like cutting the head off a Hydra; for each answer I discovered there were two new questions to take its place. This created an endless state of curiosity that keeps me playing an instrument to this day. I've been playing guitar for over twenty years and still feel like I have only scratched the surface of what is possible.

Anecdotally, there is only one situation or state of mind I've observed that completely eliminates questioning the meaning of life. When I've watched people doing what they enjoy, love, and care about the most, it happens to also be the least likely time for this person to worry about the meaning of life.

The most likely time for someone to question the point of their existence is when they are in the opposite state of mind, such as being depressed, bored or apathetic. Ironically, while in these states

we are asking the question yet simultaneously we are in our least curious mindset! It's like trying to answer a question when you don't care about or want to hear the answer.

To put it simply, the only time we worry about the meaning of life is when we care about the answer but without wanting to participate in the search. Conversely, the only time we feel certain life has meaning is when we don't care about the answer and are thrilled with the questioning search. In the process of searching we feel meaning. And, as science will show you, every time an answer is discovered it only raises more questions.

As we align more to the process of searching than becoming attached to answers, we embrace the Explore phase of The 3X Model. This builds our confidence through giving meaning to everything we search for, rather than hoping meaning will come from a single answer. The hope often dies as the answer we wished for proves to be unsatisfactory (ask any millionaire if money truly solves all of life's problems). We can reinvigorate that hope and confidence by simply posing another question, creating another fascinating riddle to solve.

STUCK vs MOVING

Another way to look at this is to examine the very nature of questions and answers. What is a question and what is an answer? And how the hell is the meaning of life "Four Apples" like I claimed earlier?

Let's start with answers.

An answer is a single moment in time, a destination point at which a truth is identified, cataloged, labeled, described and agreed upon. It is the effect part of a "cause and effect" relationship — the structured sequence to which we give a language.

"Four" is the answer we give to the question "What does two plus two equal?" This type of answer also allows for contextual adaptation, such as "Four apples" being the answer to "What do I get when I combine two apples with another two apples?"

Until the words "four apples" are spoken, those fruit could have been just about anything. They could have been "a bushel of fruit," "some of the ingredients for an apple pie," or even "a boring lunch." However, once "four apples" is the label decided and agreed upon, the magical possibilities of the fruit are destroyed, leaving only one answer. We are now stuck with "four apples," and the movement we felt in the search for a description of the fruit has died. We have arrived at the Four Apples destination and the journey is over… unless we choose to keep searching.

Which brings us to questions.

If Four Apples is the destination, there must have been a journey to arrive there. Think of the epic journey that led up to the simple answer of "four apples." In order for those two words to be spoken, homo sapiens had to evolve, build critical thinking to the point of being able to make decisions, discover apples, create a context for apples to co-exist with humans, develop a language to describe the apples, create yet another language called mathematics to quantify the apples, care enough about apples to bother counting them, and develop stomach ulcers from too much apple-related anxiety. The simple answer of Four Apples describes the entire lifespan of the human race; the entire series of questions and answers that humans have experienced to date.

The meaning of human life is, therefore, Four Apples. Sorry, all religions, I've just ruined it for you.

OK, maybe not, but this is how ridiculous it is to use any one point in the timeline of life to describe its meaning. What is so wondrous about the Four Apples answer is the mind-boggling series of questions that led to it. The human search required to enable Four Apples to exist is what is so wonderful, complex and meaningful.

Literally the second after I wrote that sentence I checked my email (because I like to procrastinate while writing) and saw this from Isam, a guy I'd had a session with this week.

"Thank you for your time yesterday. After the session I felt reassured of my approach toward my lifestyle. I was always given the false belief we have to put the pieces together of one puzzle, but my mind always had an idea that we can create as many puzzles as we want with the pieces we have."

In a way, this describes it perfectly. When Isam was trying to find a single answer he became stressed, unsure of himself, and worried about the meaning of life. Once he developed the curiosity to explore lots of different avenues, he suddenly feels certainty, wonder and excitement. Worry disappears, his focus of attention finds the present moment and prioritizes what is important, and he can get on with making meaningful things happen.

When we ask a question we are in movement. Curiosity is both a single point in time and a continuous, never-ending process; simultaneously it is an infinite number of sides and a single line. On the other hand, when we find an answer, we stay still and will remain still (otherwise known as stuck) until another question prompts further movement and curiosity.

See, those who want to stop searching will remain stuck with Four Apples, and Four Apples is all they'll have for the rest of their lives. This is the equivalent of thinking that your current job, friendships, partner, health status and daily routine are decided forever. Staying with one single answer is another way of saying, "There will never be a better way." Some people, perhaps even you, stick with a single answer and are eventually crushed by the powerlessness and monotony of it all.

The others, however, the curiously confident ones, would see the Four Apples and ask:

"What else could these four apples be?"

UNCONSCIOUS EVOLUTION

Environmental documentarian David Attenborough first sparked my interest in science and the natural world, and his documentaries were a catalyst of curiosity for me. I remember being five years old and hearing his deep, epically God-like voice as he described the growth of a tree while I watched as a tree grew in front of my eyes through the enthralling and magical effects of time-lapse photography. While animal evolution fascinated me also, those childhood experiences about the evolution of plant-life captured me most.

As far as we know, plants are unconscious. Yet they have this seemingly miraculous ability to adapt to and evolve around the challenges of their environment, without even needing the capability of awareness. And I believe through the evolution of plants we see the meaning of life being played out in its purest form. Because plants themselves lack the measurable capability of choice and decision making, their adaptation is reactive and random. Those that randomly change in a more helpful way will survive, while those that don't soon get eaten or have their sunlight Bogart'd by another more aggressive plant.

Plants, in my mind, put to rest any argument that curiosity is a conscious choice or something limited to animals of certain intelligence or conscious awareness. We see through the searching and testing nature of natural selection that curiosity, or seeking constant change, is inherent in all living things that thrive. Start to think about your own life; are you seeking constant change or are you trying to keep things the same?

While plants may not experience the emotional and cognitive sensations or systems that we humans relate to curiosity, they do demonstrate the same behavior in their own way. Through mutation they constantly "seek" new ways of interacting with their environment, and through unconscious trial and error they adapt and thrive.

I'm not a scientist, so my understanding of the evolutionary process is basic at best, but what seems apparent to me is the constant theme of change through testing. In animals we can see the curiosity process in a more relatable way, such as watching a family of elephants forever change their environment in their search for water. Through the play of young animals, we can see the evolutionary process demonstrated within a single lifetime, as some animals learn things randomly that serve them better than other animals and peers within their own species.

We relate more to animals and how they adapt on a day-to-day basis. We see a kitten play-fighting with a small toy and believe we are watching curiosity being performed. These kinds of experiences lead us to believe that curiosity is something that is solely experienced by sentient beings; that you need awareness to be curious. All you really need to live by the value of curiosity, however, are experimental actions and challenging environments.

If you put a male lion through the trial and torment of a wild African upbringing, where it must constantly (if unwittingly) seek new ways of surviving and eventually dominating, he will one day rule a pride. However, if you took an equivalent male lion and raised it in captivity, he would likely die quickly once released into the wild.

The second lion never stood a chance because he never got to learn from exploration and experimentation in the real world. Curiosity actually saves the cat. I know, I know, that was weak, and to think I promised myself no lame puns in this book. Too late.

In the TED talk mentioned earlier by Dr. Stuart Brown we see that when laboratory rats are not allowed to play, not allowed to be curious, they will die of starvation rather than face and overcome risks (http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital). All living things, both plants and animals, and those odd in-between creatures like sea-cucumbers, survive better if they live by the value of curiosity.

In business, the companies that thrive are those that adapt. You look at the management and leaders of these companies and you will see evidence of living by the value of curiosity, through willingness to take risks, humility in self-assessment, and perseverance toward improvement. These companies never stop asking their clients for feedback, questioning their systems, or adapting to the marketplace. They survive and thrive due to being fluid while their competitors, who mire in bureaucracy and doing things a certain way because "that's how we've always done it," eventually flop.

Life is based on the foundation of constant change; therefore, a final answer would surely destroy it. If the evolutionary concept of consistent change was somehow halted, my guess is that everything would die. It's like how a plate can remain balanced on top of a think stick as long as it keeps

spinning. What keeps your world spinning is the search, the endless questions, not stopping with any one answer.

CAUSE AND EFFECT BIAS

If indeed the search is the reason for living, why are we programmed to be so enthusiastic about sticking with an answer? Why do we believe confidence comes from being certain rather than embracing the mystery of uncertainty?

This is where we delve deeper into one of the most important concepts in this book, something that can rule your life without you even being aware of its existence — causal attribution bias (which I like to call "cause-and-effect" bias). This bias is the enemy of curiosity.

From a young age we feel instinctively driven to link things together. We like to see what leads to what, figure out how things happen in sequence, and discover the Why behind everything. We feel satisfaction when we think we know how things work, which is another way of saying we take comfort in believing in causal relationships.

I think our natural curiosity becomes infected by fear of the unknown, motivating us to explore constantly yet simultaneously creating a needy investment in knowing the answer. This investment is what I believe aggravates our cause-and-effect bias. We falsely believe there is order in the Universe that meets our own subjective standards, and that we can somehow eventually be free of the unknown.

You can even witness me being affected by cause-and-effect bias, right now, as I try to explain what I think causes it!

If there is such a thing as cause, if we really can accurately map out how things work, then we can finally allow ourselves to feel safe in the assumption that there is a reason for it all. This is the carrot that our mind dangles in front of us, the idea that there is a final answer, that everything has been leading up to something, that it is all going to plan, and that the soul-crushing concept of completely random chaos is not something we need to think about.

A common example of this playing out is the concept of "rejection." I ask a girl out, she says no, and I describe this to myself as "being rejected." Cause and effect bias leads me to believe that the girl has said no because I'm not a good person in some way. But is this true?

Think of the number of factors involved in this situation. First, there are the broad differences between our personalities. Then there is the exact behavior I engaged in — the way I asked her out on a date — and how she judged that behavior with all her biases. Then there is the time of day, our different moods, our thought patterns, the temperature, the background noise, memories of what had recently occurred, beliefs around dating in general, beliefs around who is an "ideal" partner, and on and on and on. Then there are the past factors, like our childhoods and upbringing, our experiences as teenagers, and so forth.

Each of these factors contain millions of variables. The two of us coming together and having a discussion about dating is therefore the result of billions of variables all playing a part in some way. So when she said no, it is actually impossible to pinpoint why that was her decision. Oh, she'll have a story in her head as to why she said no, as will I, but neither of us will be even close to accurate. Her entire life led her to say no, just like my entire life led me to ask her out, and so the interaction itself

only accounts for a microscopic fraction of a percentage of the causal factors involved. How “good” I am as a person has almost nothing to do with her decision.

Science has a workaround for this bias, and it’s called correlation. You see, I might appear to be pro-science, but actually I’m pro-truth. Some human explanations for science do not line up with truthfulness as I understand it.

Only humans could come up with the concept of correlation. In our desperate need for there to be cause-and-effect reliability, we design systems that minimize and avoid the outliers so we are able to say something is statistically significant, which is the science version of, “Yeah, we’re pretty much sure A causes B… most of the time… and in the right circumstances.”

With correlation we are able to pat ourselves on the back and assure ourselves that we’ve found an answer amongst the terrifying chaos of endless questions. I’m not saying correlation is inaccurate, but I am saying that our desire to identify the link between a question and an answer can be needy, not confident. We are so desperate to believe in order, we will clutch at anything that appears to have a structural link to something else.

But what if we were to welcome the concept of endless questions? What if, instead of searching for a final answer, we just searched? Imagine if we looked at the chaos as fun and exciting, instead of terrifying.

In psychology research you can clearly see an obsession with categorization. We so badly want to be able to batch and categorize people because we believe it means we understand them, can treat them, and can improve on their ideas. You’ll do this yourself. Most people I know will refer to themselves as either an introvert or an extrovert. You can see them gain relief from categorizing themselves in such a way, and yet no one person is exactly the same as another within these categories; both categories are broad to the point of being fictional.

These categories are all reliable to some extent, but one thing I learned when rehabilitating criminal offenders was that all the theory, lectures and labels I was taught did not adequately prepare me for dealing with the real thing. A unique person may fit into categories if we mentally squint our eyes and tilt to the left a bit, but she will do it in her own way, with her own never-before-seen nuances. And if we’re unwilling to adapt to these, if we allow ourselves to become judgmental, we can miss our opportunity for change.

“Beatrice”…

The most difficult offender I ever worked with — let’s call her Beatrice — had Borderline Personality Disorder (on the extremely harmful end of the spectrum), combined with a diagnosis of Munchhausen by-proxy. This means she was prone toward manipulative splitting behaviors (turning people against each other), narcissism, and as if this wasn’t enough, she possessed a specific disposition toward harming children in order to get attention. Frankly, she was a fucking nightmare to work with.

Beatrice’s most difficult tendency to manage was extreme self-harm, which she would often do in front of spectators in order to cause a dramatic scene. I won’t describe it here, but let’s just say it wasn’t your run of the mill stuff; it was horror-movie Saw-type graphic. She would engage in this kind of behavior multiple times per week, usually in response to a perceived slight or as an attempt to get her requests approved.

We tried everything. We read article upon article on how to manage Personality Disorders, we researched Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and I even admit to a brief desperate foray into dog-training strategies. Anything, just to find a tactic that would reduce the sheer amount of suffering she inflicted on herself and others. And through this searching, we eventually found a solution.

The first breakthrough came when we finally let go of our cause and effect assumptions about her behavior. Instead of trying to link her actions with Borderline Personality Disorder or any of her other categories, we let go of being able to figure her out through labels. Instead of trying to find the answer, we started asking questions, like "What's more important to her than self-harming?" and "If we saw a person without her diagnoses exhibiting this harmful behavior, how would we manage it?"

We decided to test out an idea; we put together a contract based on some DBT principles about what consequences self-harming would have for Beatrice. We found something she wanted (permission to visit her brother) and used this as an external motivator for her. We promised her she would be allowed to visit her brother but only after two whole weeks without a self-harm incident. At first she tested us, but she saw that we pushed the visit date back from the moment she engaged in the old behavior. Within a few days she accepted the deal, stuck to it, and was rewarded appropriately.

Through curiosity we let go of trying to find an answer to explain Beatrice, and instead just started testing different ideas. We let go of certainty and welcomed curiosity instead; we replaced cause and effect assumptions with experimentation. The constant testing eventually solved the riddle (though of course there were plenty more riddles to come). We never found a final answer, but through constant adaptation we were able to reduce the amount of harm she caused.

The solution was playing with experimentation instead of trying to find the right final answer. Success came when we were open-minded and curious; conversely, trying to stick with what was already known or assumed only left us failing and frustrated.

IN THE END…

Whether you agree that curiosity is the meaning of life doesn't really matter to me; I would prefer you choose beliefs based on merit and evidence rather than agreement with some author who doesn't cite nearly enough references. However, I would like to invite you to temporarily embrace the idea that curiosity is what will bring you the rewards you seek.

You are the Universe.

Conscious awareness is the space where everything else takes place. Who "you" are does not end with your mind, or your body, or the limit of your sight, hearing and touch. Everything you experience takes place inside your mind, therefore everything is in you, and you are everything. There is nothing "out there." It is all internal. Curiosity is the form of exploring the internal Universe. Consciousness is the Universe observing itself; you are pure curiosity.

My theory is that confidence is the rewarding internal state you feel when you are engaged in a meaningful search of the world and yourself, conducted with integrity and courage. I use the word authenticity merely as a means of wrapping all of this together, as a description for living by the meaning of life as I've described it. If you leave this book thinking, "Screw you, Dan, I'll find my own meaning," then hooray! That's exactly what I want for you.

As long as you’re searching, you are evolving, adapting, surviving and thriving. When you stop and settle on a final answer, your soul dies and your meaning of life will die with it.

Chapter Nine: Do the Wrong Thing

Ultimately, the most challenging task I face in my life is trying to figure out the "right" thing to do. Some decisions seem easy and automatic, like choosing what to eat for breakfast, while others seem difficult and impossibly complex, like deciding whether to start a new career, or trying to figure out why my girlfriend is upset with me. The deeper I look into any decision, the more complicated it becomes.

Confidence is about achieving a level of decision making that is mostly free from doubt and hesitancy. Not because there's anything wrong with doubt or hesitancy, but because these sensations are warning signs that you are experiencing shame. When you take a long time to make a decision, it's because you're trying to avoid some predicted outcome that you attach "bad" or "wrong" to, and that slows you down. If you want to make strongly authentic decisions, something will need to change about your perspective on getting it "wrong."

Decisions do not actually take long to make; they occur in nano-seconds, almost instantaneously. In Malcolm Gladwell's popular book Blink, he explores evidence that accurate and helpful decision making often occurs within the first two seconds of being exposed to the options available. But the stories and voices in our heads, which come in after the decision is made, can make things so confusing.

What confuses us most — the barrier that slows down the authentic decision making process — is trying to figure out the difference between our own core values and the influence of societal pressure. It's easy to get lost in your attempt to discover if you're doing something because it's right for you, or because you only believe it's right due to conditioning and social programming.

A great example of this occurred in front of me last night. I was coaching a young man (let's call him Jim) who has recently been pushing his comfort-boundaries by initiating conversations with total strangers.

In some cases, meeting new people raises extreme levels of anxiety for Jim, particularly when he wants to initiate a conversation with a woman he finds physically attractive. He was so concerned about upsetting women that he researched "street harassment" online and found a plethora of articles on the suffering women were experiencing, due to men abusing and harassing them as they went about their daily business. These articles made my client feel like he was a rapist just for being interested in women at all.

We explored where his fear was coming from. It appeared Jim was concerned that his behavior was disrespectful to women. When approaching men, or women he was not attracted to, these fears did not seem so powerful; only when sexual attraction become involved did he start to worry that he was harassing the women he initiated conversations with. He had shame attached to his sexual desire, and his plan to engage in initiating behavior was triggering that shame.

What's interesting about this is Jim was feeling certain he was being respectful by his own standards of what respect means, until he started considering initiating conversations with attractive women. After reading those articles, his certainty that he was being respectful started to diminish until eventually he was convinced that was in fact being disrespectful. His behavior — the way he started conversations — had not changed. So what happened to his certainty about being respectful?

As discussed in the values chapter earlier, sometimes figuring out the “right” thing to do becomes complicated by society’s virtues. To recap; virtue is the word I use to describe what happens when an authority figure dictates which values you should live by and how you should live by them.

In Jim’s case, the authority figure were the authors of the articles (who turned out to be significantly biased as they identified themselves as hardcore third-wave feminists, a group known for subscribing to the idea that men are solely at fault for all wrongs in society). Jim’s formerly clear value of respect was mutated by believing the virtues described in the articles, i.e., that it is always disrespectful for a man to initiate a conversation with a woman he does not already know. The authority figure was controlling Jim’s behavior through leading him to doubt his interpretation of the value of respect and then becoming ashamed of his behavior.

I asked Jim to describe what he would have to do to ensure that he was being respectful. We did this by looking at the reverse: what someone else would need to do to him for him to feel respected. He came up with a list of things that a person could do, such as treating Jim as a normal human being, allowing him to leave whenever he wanted, wishing him the best no matter how he reacted, and paying attention to him when he spoke.

You see, Jim was easily able to identify what being respectful meant to him. What it meant to live by the value of respect was obvious and required very little consideration. It’s only when he allowed society’s virtue to cloud up his mind that he became confused. His decision about what it meant to be respectful came out almost as soon as I had posed the question. When I asked Jim if he behaved in this respectful way when initiating a conversation with an attractive woman, he had no doubt that he did. Until he read the articles, he was entirely sure of what it meant to be respectful and that he was living by what he believed in.

SWITCHING FROM WHAT? TO WHY?

The main problem we encounter in the Explore phase of The 3X Model is getting stuck overthinking a decision. This usually comes after we ask ourselves, “What is the right thing to do?”

This question always has so many potential answers that it quickly becomes a roaring, incomprehensible cloud of thought as your brain spits out variable after variable, trying to find a single answer that will please everyone in existence and guarantee success. Not exactly the most fertile ground for assertive decision-making, right?

When you ask yourself, “What is the right thing to do?” you are immediately compelled to seek out virtues; you start to look for advice from others or your environment on how you should behave. This is the main source of your indecision, doubt and procrastination. There are more than seven billion people in the world, so trying to find a single behavior that they’ll all agree with is a hell of a mission, to say the least. Luckily, there is a better way than trying to figure out the right thing to do or say…

It’s about asking Why?

A man initiating a conversation with a woman is actually a neutral behavior. The “right” and “wrong” of it is totally subjective and contextual. Would the hardcore feminists consider it harassment if a man approached to advise them that they had won a million dollars, or to hand them a purse they had just accidentally dropped? Probably not (though to be fair, I have seen some pretty cringeworthy things on the Internet that tell me there would be exceptions). Giving someone a

million dollars is unlikely to be considered harassment, yet at a basic level it is the foundational behavior as the men who harass and abuse women; a man has stopped a woman while she walks and said something to her.

Yes, the words each of these two imaginary men use will be different, but already we can see with this thought-experiment that the act of stopping someone to talk with them is not in itself harassment. Initiating a conversation with a stranger cannot be considered inherently disrespectful, or otherwise there would be no exceptions. How it's done – the context – is massively important. And it's not really about the words either, which we'll explore in a minute.

What it comes down to is intention. What was the man's purpose for interrupting the woman's day? Why is he engaging in this behavior? Take a second to think about it. What do you think is the key difference between a man stopping a woman to make a lewd sexually aggressive pass at her, compared with a man stopping a woman to deliver a financial windfall?

The difference is simple. One man is trying to get something from the woman, while the other is trying to give.

One man wants to get a reaction, get approval from his mates, get a phone number, get laid, get validation. The other wants to give happiness, give excitement, give security. One man is trying to take value away from the woman while the other man is attempting to increase the value in her life. They are doing the same thing, fundamentally it's the same behavior, but they have completely opposite reasons why they are doing it.

From this example we can see that what you do is almost irrelevant; what really matters are the reasons behind the actions you take. Once you get the reason aligned with your values, the matter of what to do becomes a fairly straightforward process, and decision making time is short. There are exceptions, of course, particularly at the beginning of your journey to valued living, but most of the time, for the clients I work with, figuring out the right thing to do is pretty clear-cut once they know why they are doing it.

This is why I did not acknowledge earlier some of the key details that describe the difference in the two hypothetical situations with men initiating conversations with women. The abusive harassers and Pick Up Artists will say completely different words than the guy offering a million dollars, no doubt about it. They might make a nasty judgment about her appearance or physical features, or they might try to lure her into a conversation with indirect psychological traps. So what is our poor friend Jim to do if he's not sure about the right thing to say and does not want to accidentally find himself in the harassment category?

All Jim needs to do is figure out why he's talking to the woman in the first place and, more importantly, why starting a conversation with an attractive woman feels more intimidating to him than any other type of person. The key is identifying the different reasons he has to talk to different types of people.

When I explored this with Jim, we discovered there was a clear difference between the two types of people in Jim's mind (attractive vs not attractive). It was about whether Jim was experiencing emotional attachment to outcomes. The only reason you'll ever get nervous about any situation is because you're worried that it will not go well.

In Jim's case, he was able to approach guys and females he was not attracted to without any needy nervousness because there was nothing he wanted to get from them. His reasons — his why — was to live by the values of courage, honesty and generosity. He would attempt to add value to their day

without needing them to accept him, and in doing so feel the reward of being the kind of guy he always wanted to be (a.k.a. the man who lives by his values to serve the world).

With the attractive women, on the other hand, Jim's desires led him to predict certain outcomes he could get, and he became emotionally invested in achieving those outcomes. His reason why was to get a girlfriend, get sex, get validation and get acceptance. This makes it difficult for him to figure out the right thing to do. All he needed to do was bring the healthy reasons that were so clear from his social experiences with people he was not attracted to into his interactions with attractive women.

Of course, letting go of needy reasons why, a.k.a. attachment to outcomes, is easier said than done…

LETTING GO OF OUTCOMES

Someone trying to get is emotionally attached to predicted outcomes; they are focused on achieving an imagined result in the future (which is, of course, a complete fiction). Conversely, someone trying to give has automatically let go of receiving an external reward. They are free to live by their values without being restricted by the imagined consequences of their actions, and no matter how well it goes, they will always win because they receive satisfaction for living by their values.

The quandary for most people is this: how do you let go of outcomes without letting go of motivation? If you aren't trying to get something, what's the point of even getting out of bed in the morning? Not seeing there being a reason besides getting something leads most people to procrastinate.

Let's start by clarifying an important point. "Letting go of outcomes" is not the same as "not wanting anything." You can want and desire something yet still let go of your neediness toward acquiring it. Mastering this particular skill will lead you to the most satisfaction. The magical art of pursuing goals without any hope attached to achieving them will allow you to enjoy the process of living in each moment. You can be pleasantly surprised by "successes" without requiring those positive results to feel good about yourself, and without "failures" having any negative impact on your motivation to continue trying.

This confusion about the difference between letting go of outcomes and not wanting anything comes, in my mind, from the conditioning we receive during our upbringing, particularly in school. While we are learning and being tested, there is no allowance for pointless action; everything you do in school is designed to get you some kind of reward, with the only available alternatives being quitting or punishment. Very few schools promote enjoyment of the process, and of course it would be extremely challenging to achieve this in an environment where everything is subjectively judged on inflexible, merit-based criteria (e.g., exams).

The irony is that letting go of outcomes increases your potential for successful results. When you are highly motivated and free of neediness, your decisions will be based on your values, which means your behavior will be highly aligned with what is right for you personally. In other words, you will act in a way that is more likely to get you the rewards you enjoy most. (By the way, we will cover how to let go of outcomes soon).

Allow me to share some examples with you.

DATING

If you go on a date with a new person while trying to get a relationship, your natural authentic behavior will be replaced by manipulative behavior. You'll hide the things about yourself that you consider to be unattractive, and you'll promote your better qualities or even just blatantly lie. You'll pretend to enjoy everything they are saying and fake interest in things you find boring. Or, if you're a Pick Up Artist or some other form of trained manipulator, you'll be focused the entire time on maneuvering them toward feeling good about you. Seems like a pretty reliable strategy, right?

Well, what I have seen in my many years in this field is quite the opposite. People either feel like they cannot connect with anyone, or even worse they end up in relationships with people who are a terrible fit for them, which just ends in misery for all parties. Furthermore, even when it goes well an insecure neediness follows them throughout the entire process. Even if they manage to get into a relationship, they constantly worry about being cheated on, getting dumped, or being discovered for their flaws. How exhausting!

One client I worked with about eighteen months ago — let's call her Emma — was willing to try a different approach. When she went on dates, she wore comfortable clothes and no makeup. She didn't try to impress her date. Instead she focused on being as honest as she was capable of being.

Emma's purpose for dating — her reason why — changed from "trying to find a relationship" to practicing authenticity and inviting people to connect genuinely with her. She would present an honest representation of herself and encourage her date to do the same. She put no effort into making it work; she just explored both herself and her date with curiosity.

Fast forward to this year and she's now engaged to her perfect match. They are about to have their first child together, have gone into business together, and have created a lifestyle that suits them both. I've met her partner and he is so much like her it's scary. And they are not the only example. So many of my clients find partners once they stop trying to get and start living by their values instead.

Are you willing to put in a few months of honesty to find your ideal partner, or even learn to enjoy life being without a partner?

CAREER

When you go into a job interview, how do you usually feel? If you're like most people I speak to, you feel pressured, nervous and eager to please.

Now imagine you're the interviewer, going through a dozen applicants in a single day. One after the other, an eager, desperate applicant sits in front of you and tries their best to tell you what you want to hear. The neediness is palpable; you feel like you have no idea what the applicant will be like to actually work with because they are hiding so much of themselves.

Then, someone different walks in. They seem curious and interested in the role they're applying for. In contrast to the sweaty eagerness of the previous applicants, this one seems to be trying to figure out if the company is the right fit for them. They have standards and appear happy to forgo the job opportunity if those standards are not met. Even more noticeable is their seeming lack of ability to lie. No matter what questions you ask, they give you a straightforward and honest answer; often highlighting their own weaknesses, areas for development, and sometimes challenging you to rephrase questions they found difficult to understand.

Would you hire them? Could you bring yourself to hire someone who has high standards, maintains curiosity and honesty rather than pretending just to please you, someone who is willing to lose the opportunity in order to maintain their integrity? Maybe not. Maybe you'd prefer the anxious people-pleaser who gave you the perfect answers and claimed to love the company more than her own free time. Or maybe you want your company to have employees of integrity, and you're willing to invest in training their skills in order to benefit from their values and confidence.

When you go into a job interview trying to get the job, your behavior will be the same as everyone else who is applying. You will not stand out. With this strategy your only hope is to have a significantly superior resume to your competition or be lucky enough that none of the others are excellent at job interviews. Your neediness will be, at the very least, boring. The panel interviewing you have probably seen it hundreds of times before, and it triggers them to categorize you as being "just like all the others." Not the best impression for a job application.

My most successful job interview to date was an application to become a Senior Quality Advisor for the Department of Corrections. Everyone else in this job was close to twice my age with at least twice my level of experience. On paper, it looked impossible. But I had two advantages, which voided these barriers. First, to be fair, I was the only person who applied for this particular round of hiring (but they still had high standards). Second, I blew them away at the job interview with a level of honesty they had never seen before. (I received feedback confirming this later.) Considering the job required someone who valued transparency and accuracy, being boldly honest in the interview was simply the best thing I could have done. In being willing to lose the job, I scored a role well outside my level of experience and qualifications.

Many of my clients have experimented with applying for jobs without neediness, through choosing instead to use the job application process as an opportunity to practice living by their values. They tell the truth about their skills in interviews in order to practice honesty. They apply for jobs that are out of their league to practice courage and determination. They challenge the company they're applying with to prove themselves to practice the values of assertiveness and respect. They ask questions about the leaders at the company to live by the value of curiosity.

And, eventually, almost every person I've worked with who does this ends up getting offered amazing jobs, which they originally assumed were impossible to get.

HEALTH

Dieting is hard to do. Research shows that statistically nearly all people who try to follow a strict diet plan fail sooner rather than later (see Secrets from the Eating Lab by Traci Mann, PhD). I would suggest the reason for this is not about the diet, although eating in a strange, new and unnatural pattern is bound to bring up massive motivational resistance from the brain. Instead, I believe it is more about why the person diets in the first place.

I've yet to meet someone who claims they are on a diet simply to improve their health, with the exception of sick people I've known who are following a diet prescribed by a doctor to prevent their death (and even they usually have trouble sticking with it). Everyone I've ever known to be on a diet basically had the same reason for doing so. They wanted to look better.

Even the people who are dieting for sporting reasons often still have an underlying concept about aesthetics. Nobody I've met on a diet has ever said something like, "It doesn't matter if I look a bit chubby as long as I'm physically fit and healthy." I think dieting is rarely about values; it is much

more likely to be about getting the approval that comes with having a pleasing physical appearance, both to yourself and others. Dieting is more likely to be about a virtue than a value-based behavior. I wonder how often blind people go on diets compared with the visually capable community? If anyone know this information, please email me at dan@brojo.co.nz.

Like everything else that is dependent on outcomes, your motivation starts to fluctuate as soon as you believe you are not seeing results. I once completed the Body 4 Life challenge started by Bill Phillips. I did the whole three-month program and ate nothing but boring food the entire time. I was looking great; best aesthetic shape I'd ever been in. Then I went camping away for the Christmas and New Year's break. One week of eating shit food and drinking beer and I lost all the progress I had made. I immediately reverted to a more sedentary and unhealthy eating lifestyle because exercise and healthy eating seemed pointless if the "results" were so easily lost.

There are others, however, who change the way they eat without calling it "dieting." They don't brag about it or post pictures of their food up on Facebook, and they don't feel the need to call themselves something or belong to a group. They simply remove what they believe to be damaging foodstuffs from their regime and replace these with what they believe to be healthy food. What's the difference between these people and the dieters?

Values.

When you change what you eat so that you can live by your values, it becomes a lot easier to maintain motivation. Instead of asking yourself, "What can I eat to reduce body fat to achieve a more pleasing physical appearance?" you can ask yourself, "What do I need to eat right now to live by the value of self-respect?" By doing this you automatically remove one of the biggest motivational barriers to dieting — the lack of visible results. Instead of waiting to look good before feeling rewarded for your food choices, you can gain immediate satisfaction from taking a value-based action; you are applying behavioral integrity.

If you're trying to reduce body fat percentage, with the aim of getting slim or "cut" by eating healthier foods, your motivation relies on seeing evidence that eating these foods is making you look better. I believe this is why most dieting fails so early in the process. When you are not seeing the results you unreasonably expected to see, you will find it increasingly more difficult to convince yourself that choosing the healthy option is a rewarding thing to do. Eventually, you will say, "Screw it. Nothing works anyway." You'll derail from the entire process.

When living by values, like respect, discipline, and caring (all aimed inward to yourself), you'll never need to lose weight, gain abs, or get compliments on your appearance. You will be choosing to eat healthy almost every time without worrying about your looks because you have created a situation where you feel guilty not to. You leave yourself with no choice but to take what you perceive to be the healthier option, while also allowing yourself the freedom to occasionally "cheat" when living by the values of playfulness or balance, so that you don't go crazy.

PRACTICAL METHODS FOR LETTING GO OF OUTCOMES

To make authentic decisions, where your values guide you toward action, you must first let go of your needy attachment to predicted outcomes. During my research, I was disappointed to discover that while many thought leaders comment on letting go of outcomes at a high level, none that I looked at were able to articulate the process by which a person can practically do this.

In light of this, I'd like to share some practical methods you can use to reduce your attachment to outcomes and make decisions based more on your values. Bear in mind; when I say let go of outcomes, I don't mean convince yourself you don't want something when really you do. As you'll see, I'm talking more about making it impossible for you to control outcomes, so that you have no choice but to detach from results emotionally and focus on something more meaningful.

It's all about letting go of control; taking your hands off the steering wheel and just enjoying a spotaneous ride down the honesty freeway.

Revealing The Strategy

In social contexts, whether it's a party, the workplace, a date, or a family dinner, the most common outcome we become attached to is approval. In our needy attempts to gain approval, we moderate our truth and hide our intentions. We mind read and pretend until our values become completely lost in a cloud of performance anxiety.

As I've already mentioned earlier, some people might even appear to be seeking disapproval by being provocative or contrary, yet at the core of this behavior is the need to gain attention, which is actually a form of validation. They're seeking approval too; it's a different strategy to people-pleasing but equally as needy.

Rather than trying remove your need for approval completely — a nearly impossible task — you can instead choose to take actions that disable your ability to get approval. I call this Revealing the Strategy. See, we all do things that are designed to manipulate others into noticing us, approving of our existence, and validating our hope that we are worthy. There's nothing wrong with this behavior; it's just an outdated strategy for gaining social safety and security. But it comes at the cost of being fake and betraying your values. You gain approval but you lose integrity, and the guilt that this builds into is often described by my clients as being far more painful than the feeling of being unpopular.

Revealing the Strategy simply involves being open and honest about this manipulation when it occurs. As terrifying as it may sound, when you let others know that your behavior is aimed at manipulating them, you remove the power of the manipulation. You cannot trick someone if you tell them you are tricking them. Because you know that your manipulation will no longer work once you've revealed it, you have effectively detached from the outcome by removing your ability to get whatever it was that you were trying to get from the other person.

For example, when I first used the Question Game (described later in this book), the girl I was doing it with asked me why I wanted to play the game. I told her honestly that I had learned this game would make girls more attracted to me and more comfortable, and that because I found her attractive I wanted to use it on her.

This is what it means to Reveal the Strategy; she now was fully aware of my plan to "seduce" her. To my surprise, we continued to play the game with her having the full knowledge that it could be used in a manipulative way. This convinced me that she would no longer be able to become attracted to me, so I was able to let go of "getting" her. I gave up on sleeping with her and instead just had fun playing the game, blissfully free from the need to get her into bed, because I thought it was impossible without being able to use a strategy. Ironically, we slept together that very night.

Another time, I was telling a group of friends a long-winded story about how my father had taken me for a drive in the car to tell me about the birds and the bees. This story was hilarious, and I had all my friends in tears. Yet about fifteen minutes into the story, I was struck by the shocking realization that I was lying. The entire story was a complete fiction that I had created and embellished, just to get a laugh. At the time I had no idea why I had made the story up, and even more disturbing was the insight that I was not even aware that the story was a lie until about halfway through!

So I impulsively confessed. I stopped the story right before the fictional climax and said, “Wait. This is all complete bullshit. None of that even happened. I don’t know why I made it up, but it’s all bollocks.” What blew me away next was not just the realization I lied to myself, or even that I had the courage to disclose the truth; what surprised me most was their reaction. They loved it. All of them were so pleasantly surprised, stunned even, to hear me tell a funny story and then confess the story was a lie that they laughed even harder. I had to wait quite some time for them to stop. This was one of my first memorable experiences of being rewarded for vulnerable honesty

When you Reveal the Strategy, you give others the chance to repent their sins, because whatever manipulation tactic you’re confessing to, they do it too. Nearly everyone has that in common — the manipulative tricks we play to ensure people don’t hate us too much. Even the most honest people will still hide their deepest secrets, and this is no less a manipulative strategy than blatant lying. So you can rest assured that almost everyone you reveal your strategy to will have done the same thing themselves, many times. The best fit people for you will laugh and say, “Oh my god, I do that too!” and your bond with them will strengthen. You’ll just have to risk it first, that’s the catch. Of course, if you’re willing to lose them, there’s really no risk at all.

Here are some common strategies of manipulation that I’m aware of. See if you can catch yourself using these and be brave enough to let people know when it’s happening:

- Pretending to be interested in what someone is saying to try and make them more attracted to you (e.g., talking about their job, which you don’t understand or care about)
- Agreeing with someone just to avoid a confrontation
- Hiding your fear, anger, insecurity, disgust and confusion (e.g., automatically responding with “fine thanks” when someone asks you how you are, even when you’re not “fine”)
- Giving excuses when you cancel on people to hide reasons you think will upset them (e.g., saying, “My sister needs help with her car.” Rather than, “I don’t want to spend time with you right now.”)
- Asking someone for advice or an opinion you don’t really need just as an excuse to start a conversation with them
- Guilt-tripping someone by indirectly referencing some pain you’re in and linking it to them in some way, like letting someone borrow your car and saying, “I wanted to go to the movies today but I couldn’t find a way there, so gutted.”

Remember, it’s not about being perfect or never trying to manipulate anyone. On the contrary, it’s about catching yourself once this has already happened and letting everyone know about it. You’d be amazed at how fun and connecting this can be, and at the very least you will relieve yourself of having to remember yet another secret.

Collecting No's

Most of the outcomes you're trying to get come with a counterpart — the opposite outcome, which you're trying to avoid. In many cases, this can be classified as some form of rejection. Chasing money as an outcome is about avoiding poverty and all the social abandonment that you perceive to come with poverty. Chasing sex is often about avoiding loneliness. Chasing a promotion is often about avoiding the feeling that your career is uninteresting or pointless.

Often, you will make decisions to not chase the outcome at all because you believe it's impossible to get, or at least too difficult for your skill level. Have you ever questioned why a certainty of failure is seen as a reason not to try? On the surface it seems highly intuitive; if you can't succeed, there's no point in trying. Well, that's certainly going to appear to be the truth if you're attached to outcomes. But what happens to your motivation if you're detached from outcomes?

Values don't require success; they ask only for effort. Just making the attempt is what values are all about. Authentic decision making can be enabled by actively removing the need for success and focusing on effort. One way to do this is to choose to take actions that you know are doomed to fail. Or, as master coach Rich Litvin likes to call it: "Collecting No's."

By purposefully seeking to engage in actions you know will not succeed, you give yourself the freedom to fail. You will engage in those actions knowing that the outcome is firmly out of reach, which increases your ability to be curious. With nothing to gain, you can easily refocus on the experience itself, treating it like a playful experiment instead of a serious performance. Instead of avoiding rejection and failure, you ask yourself, "What can I attempt that is completely beyond my ability to succeed?" and then follow through on the action.

You'd be amazed at what this can do. Ironically, even though you will fail many times over, occasionally you'll succeed because you were incorrect in your assumption that you'd fail. You just did it at the perfectly right time or even because the other person involved was so impressed by your courage they want to reward you.

Like Revealing the Strategy, attempting a task that has a certain failure attached to it in your mind will trigger a lot of fear for you. This is completely understandable. You have been conditioned your entire life to hide your true intentions and win at all costs. This fear is merely your brain having a crisis as you consider breaking rules your brain has followed since childhood. You can take these actions while feeling fear, and if you start small, you can train yourself to reframe what fear means to you.

When I first began coaching, I had major fear barriers around enrolling coaching clients. I had self-worth issues that made me question my fees, and my phobia of rejection made me hesitate to reach out to people. But then I heard about the concept of Collecting No's, and it changed my mission completely. Instead of trying to enroll clients, make money, and grow my business, I started seeking to get rejected by as many people as possible.

I approached friends, family, CEOs, high status celebrities, and a range of others I thought would never want to get coaching with me. And to some extent I was correct; many didn't even reply to the messages I sent while others simply said, "No thanks." But, most importantly, some people said Yes. Many of those were unexpected because I had incorrectly assumed they didn't want help, didn't believe I could help them, or simply didn't have time to respond to some random dude offering coaching.

This process got my business off the ground. I have been Collecting No's ever since.

Not sure you're strong enough to do pull ups? Go and fail at them. Not sure that attractive person at your work likes you? Ask them out. Feel like the job opportunity is outside of your skill level? Apply for it. Collect as many No's as you can, as often as you can, and two things will start to happen. First, your fear of failure and rejection will diminish as you see continual evidence that failure doesn't actually harm you (or indeed even exist at all), and second, you'll occasionally get major Yes reactions that massively transform the quality of your life and your level of self-belief.

Giving Freely and Anonymously

After a lifetime of being trained to get, it can be difficult to even imagine another way of living. When every authority figure in your life has always rewarded you for getting and punished you for losing, it can be challenging to even attempt to let go of results altogether. You have to train yourself in an entirely new way of thinking.

What is the opposite of getting? Obvious, isn't it? Giving. What's interesting is that the opposite of giving is not getting, it's receiving. To receive something means it was given freely by an external source. To get something means you had to actively take it from the source, which is something else entirely. For example, if someone praises me on my work for no reason, that's a gift. If they praise me because I whine about how no one appreciates my work, that's a get.

What's beautiful about giving and receiving is that they are the same thing. One person gives, the other receives, yet the person giving feels the reward of giving, so they have also received, and the person receiving is the one who has given that reward. You can't go wrong in terms of living by values when you give freely.

To detach from getting completely, and thereby learn how to receive instead, you first must learn how to give freely. The easiest way to train yourself in this is to start with giving anonymously. Why? Because most of the time we "give" as an attempt to manipulate the receiver or our audience into rewarding us with approval, recognition and gratitude. We're not really giving at all, we are simply imposing an unwanted debt on those around us, and we often get bitter and resentful when they don't "pay us back."

Think about the last few times you offered to help someone. Why did you do it, really? Was it because it would feel rewarding for you to contribute to the completion of a task? Or was it because you knew it would feel rewarding to receive their gratitude and uphold your positive self-image? Most of the time, it's probably a confusing mixture of both. If you're helping someone to gain credibility, status, or accrue a favor to be collected later, you're not really giving at all; you're loaning your help to get something in return. Put it this way; would you help someone if you knew they would not appreciate it? If not, why not? Why do you need appreciation to feel good about your efforts?

By making an effort to remain anonymous when giving, you will make getting an external reward impossible, much like you do when Revealing the Strategy or Collecting No's. When your brain is convinced that you cannot receive an external reward, it will seek to feel rewarded in other ways. Anonymity removes all rewards except one — the satisfaction of giving. Once your brain has indulged in this kind of reward a number of times, you will eventually become convinced that giving freely is more satisfying emotionally than getting approval and validation from others, and you will switch to giving and receiving more naturally.

One of my favorite examples of this was a client I managed some years ago. He was an engineer and loved to create. When it was someone's birthday or Christmas, he would make toys and machines as presents. However, he always did this from a toxic place of neediness and would try his best to get recognized for these creations rather than just giving purely out of love.

So with my support, he experimented with something new. He built a scaled-down dump-truck for his young nephew for Christmas, only on the card he wrote "From Santa" instead of putting his own name. He did not tell his nephew, family or friends that he had made the truck. He was able to experience the joy of completing the creation of the truck and giving it altruistically without needing a pat on the back afterward. He was surprised to find that the added mystery everyone experienced in not knowing where the truck really came from was another gift he was able to give everyone. He still felt the needy desire to claim recognition, but was able to allow this to pass so it could be replaced by genuine satisfaction.

I was practicing this myself some years ago while I was also simultaneously working on a goal to reduce gossiping about people behind their backs. I knew it was against my values to talk shit about someone without being able to say the same thing directly to them, so instead I tried introducing the concept of giving by doing the opposite — talking them up behind their backs. Specifically, I went to managers at work and privately commended my colleagues' work and efforts. I would ask the bosses not to say anything about me to the person receiving my secret praise, so that they could reap the rewards of my support without knowing I had assisted.

Obviously, hiding your giving is a grey area for honesty. That's why I must emphasize that this is a temporary training measure, aimed to break up the outcome-focused conditioning your brain has been subjected to your entire life. As a general rule, I don't condone secrecy. However, I do believe that sometimes you need to break a few eggs to make an omelet. Once you achieve a state where you genuinely enjoy giving anonymously, you can start to become more open and transparent about it. You'll probably find that you will be less inclined to broadcast your giving anyway. You'll feel less neediness around getting recognition and it won't occur to you to brag.

There is one other way to release yourself from outcomes by giving…

Give What You Want to Get

Before we delve too deeply into this, I would like to start with a caveat about what I mean by, "give what you want to get." This is not the same as a "covert contract," described by Dr. Robert Glover in his mind-altering book No More Mr. Nice Guy.

A covert contract is basically where you do favors and other nice things for people but with a hidden agenda where you want to get paid back for your behavior. This is done secretly; the other person or people have no idea that you expect something in return, hence the name covert contract. Sometimes even you will be unaware that you have a contract. Instead you'll simply be aware of feelings of disappointment and unfairness, and you'll often find yourself full of bitterly frustrated "should haves" (for example, "I did the dishes so Sam should have made the bed or at least said thank you").

A covert contract can appear to be giving, but it is actually a sneaky kind of loan. The other person is unaware that they have to give back, that you have to get something back in order for things to be fair.

When I talk about giving what you want to get, I mean to do so free of charge and without hidden expectations. One way you can practice this is through giving anonymously, as described earlier in this chapter, but with a twist. The significant difference with giving what you want to get is that you are going to be giving a very specific type of gift — the one you wish to receive most and the one you feel the most neediness toward.

I've discovered something highly counterintuitive, which has rocked my world and changed the way I see myself entirely. It's this simple fact — while neediness feels like a hole that must be filled by getting external resources, such as love, validation and possessions, it is actually reduced through the act of giving. Giving what you want to get is about identifying what you're feeling needy about and then instead of trying to fill that hole in yourself, you aim to fill it in others.

Let's say I'm feeling lonely or insignificant because no one is listening to me. To give what I want to get would mean finding someone else who felt lonely and giving them my undivided attention. You see this form of giving in drug-addiction recovery programs. A person will go to a Narcotics Anonymous group with a lot of pain about their own addiction, but instead of trying to get relief from the others, they aim to serve the others by supporting them. This actually removes their own suffering. They fill the hole in their psyche by giving what they needed themselves.

While there is somewhat of a chicken-and-egg uncertainty about which came first — getting stuff or feeling needy — it is clear that trying to get something is always linked to feelings of neediness directly. Trying to give, on the other hand, creates sensations of fullness, completeness and peace. While this may not be true for some extreme personalities, like highly psychopathic individuals or people with Antisocial Personality Disorder, I have found anecdotally that my clients consistently report massively reduced sensations of neediness immediately after giving what they want to get.

Before you can engage in these behaviors, a deep level of exploration is required because you have to know what you are truly needy about before you can give it to someone else. I was discussing this recently at a Brojo meetup (www.brojo.co.nz), and one of the members, let's call him Rob, asked me this interesting question.

"What if I feel needy about wanting a hug? Some people don't want me to hug them, so it wouldn't exactly be giving to hug them, would it?"

The issue here is that Rob perceived his desire to be for the specific action of hugging; that's how his brain communicated the needy feeling into something he could tangibly understand in his conscious awareness. Our brains often oversimplify in this way, and we need to dig deeper to get closer to reality and therefore closer to making a decision that will support confidence growth. We think we need things like hugs, money and praise, but these surface-level outcomes merely represent a much deeper and simpler desire.

I asked Rob, "Why do you want a hug?" and the layers started to peel back. What we discovered after some brief exploration is that he gets feelings of recognition and love when someone hugs him, and therefore his neediness is about the fear that he is not recognized, does not have enough worth, and is insignificant in some way. He doesn't actually want a hug per se, he wants love and recognition.

In this example, for Rob to give what he wants to get, he can switch his focus from the surface-level representation of the need (hugging) to a much deeper level of need (recognition). Recognition and love can be given in an almost infinite number of different ways, such as praise, promotion, gifts and recommendations. Rob can find someone he feels needy about recognition with — his partner, for

example — and then he can use value-type questioning to figure out how to give recognition in a way that would be most likely to increase the value in her life. For instance, he could ask himself, “What way of giving recognition to [partner] would add the most value to her life?”

I should clarify something here. How Rob’s partner reacts to his attempt to give recognition is not the main focus. To live by the values of caring, compassion and connection, he will of course pay attention to her reaction and receive valuable feedback on what she considers to be “giving,” but her reaction is not the purpose for the action he takes. The aim is to reduce his own neediness by giving what he wants to get.

This kind of action will never have the desired anxiety-reducing effect if it comes with an attachment to outcomes (e.g., her enjoying the recognition). Like all other value-based decisions, the purpose is not to achieve a goal, it’s to live by a value, which in this case is the value of giving. (You may call it by other names. It doesn’t matter as long as you mean increasing value in someone’s life, including your own.)

Once you’ve completed your basic training for anonymous giving, the most selfless way to truly give is to first ask for both permission and guidance. This means checking in with the person you want to give to and asking how they would like you to give. Rather than trying to guess what gift would suit them, you can literally ask them how they would like to receive things like recognition, love, affection, validation, support, and all the other things you’re needy about that you now want to give. People don’t communicate about this kind of stuff enough. It’s often hidden and implied rather directly confronted. You can say to your partner, “Hey, I want to give you recognition for the things I admire about you. How would you like me to do that?”

This may raise the issue where the expectations of the person you’re trying to give to become a hindrance. They might respond with something like “You should just know, I shouldn’t have to tell you.” I strongly suggest you challenge this kind of response assertively and let them know that their belief in this kind of mind reading is likely to lead them to feel disappointed in others for the rest of their life. They will likely feel that they cannot trust you to be giving freely if you are following their instructions on how to give. You can respond by letting them know you already have the genuine desire to give, you simply want their input instead of just guessing and wasting time.

Chapter Ten: Spooning with Fear

Fearful insecurity will be your biggest barrier to genuine curiosity and exploration. Your brain's attempts to protect you from danger manifest in strange and complicated ways; often you will be unable to understand or even notice when this is happening. Your brain does not know the difference between imagined danger and real danger because there is no actual difference. Everything takes place inside your mind, and whether there is evidence for it or not, you will react the same.

"There's a huge difference between a dog that's going to eat you in your mind and an actual dog that's going to eat you. That may sound like no big deal, but many never learn that distinction… and they spend a great deal of their lives living in fight or flight response." - Jim Carrey

This becomes exceptionally difficult during the brain's process of backward rationalization, whereby the brain makes an emotional fear-based decision and then explains to itself why it did that. Often, this rationalization (a.k.a. excuse) is worded in such a way as to sound like logical common sense. For example, many of my potential coaching clients will feel they received massive value from talking with me, but when it comes to investing in the coaching they will say "I can't afford this". Yet that weekend they will go out and spend the same amount of money on alcohol while clubbing. This kind of irrational process makes it difficult to become aware that you are sabotaging yourself by straying away from hard evidence, and it clutters your mind with overthinking or analysis-paralysis.

As I've probably already mentioned, when making decisions you will have an internal experience that feels like you made the decision consciously by weighing up the costs and benefits of various options and coming to a rational conclusion. I must emphasize again that this is simply not what happens. In reality, your current belief system will basically pre-program your decisions, and "you" experience these decisions consciously as a spectator. It just feels like you're the one doing the thinking. You then go through a process to convince yourself that you consciously made the decision — a story based on a sound, rational process and good, reliable evidence. This is also known as "motivated reasoning" as Julia Galef explains in her TED talk on why you think you're right even when you're wrong (http://www.ted.com/talks/julia_galef_why_you_think_you_re_right_even_if_you_re_wrong).

I noticed this just the other day. I was stressed-hungry and so I headed down to the local corner store to get a snack to drown my feelings in comfort food, which was already going against my health-related goals. Luckily for my values, the store was closed, which I reacted to with frustration and a sense of loss. Once I got home, I went online to order a pizza. All the while my mind was telling me, "Well, the shop was closed so this is the only choice left." I had almost pressed "send" on my order when I suddenly realized that I had been lying to myself. I cancelled the order and made myself some toast instead. This toast option had been available to me the entire time, but I simply hadn't noticed it because I was listening to the story my fear was telling me about my need for junk food.

Fear lies. Fear is like a con-man; it uses your weaknesses and ego against you to manipulate you into believing the safe and seemingly "easier" path is the truthful way to live. Fear does not give a shit about the longer term consequences of your decisions and subsequent actions, but it will pretend that it cares about long-term satisfaction by throwing up thoughts about the future. It's an act; all fear cares about is you feeling comfortable and safe right now.

A great example of this is the fear of public speaking. In your mind you start worrying about the future — what people will think of your performance, what will happen if you screw it up, how embarrassing it will be, and so on. It appears that fear is on your side. It feels like you are logically visualizing a realistic future and trying to manage some dangerous risks. You'll notice that this often begins with the hope of figuring out a good reason to simply quit.

Yet in most cases, public speaking is not measurably dangerous and there is no evidence of actual risk. It can be a great opportunity to improve your future through becoming bolder, delivering your message to the world and helping others add to their own ideas. Through public speaking you can have a positive impact on the world in a significant way while increasing your own levels of courage and confidence. Evidence will show you that very few people are physically harmed by public speaking; it's far more dangerous to get into a car than it is to get on stage. So why would fear try to talk you out of it with horror stories of embarrassment, failure and humiliation?

It's because what fear really wants is for you to feel "good" right now. This is often referred to as the Problem of Instant Gratification (PIG) — the needy impulse to seek comfort and pleasure immediately. As you experience the anxiety and butterflies of nervousness while waiting to get on stage, your fear is aggravated and seeks ways to reduce those uncomfortable feelings. Your brain perceives those uncomfortable feelings as harbingers of danger and seeks to convince you to leave the situation. Fear doesn't understand that anxiety can actually be a pleasant experience with great long-term rewards, if you can just stick with it a little longer and accept it as a normal human emotion.

Fear knows it won't be able to convince you to quit by accurately saying, "You feel uncomfortable now but you'll be glad you did it." So instead it comes up with a different story about the future. Fear tries to put you off by predicting a disaster and then relieving you with a solution for how you can avoid it. This is simply to manipulate you into believing that it is logical to quit now for the sake of avoiding future pain, when in reality it's only now that you are experiencing pain. After the speaking is done, you will most likely feel good — perhaps even proud of yourself. So essentially your fear is lying to you in order to reduce the discomfort of now.

THE MYTH OF SAFETY AND COMFORT

We live in an age where the most dangerous addiction goes almost completely unnoticed. While governments around the world continue to criminalize the use of mood-altering substances and put millions of people who require healthcare into prison, they simultaneously overlook a far more dangerous form of harmful behavior. Probably because, unlike crack and heroin, when you're on this drug, it can look like life is going well for you.

Statistically there is debate about the most addictive and harmful drugs. Some say alcohol, some say methamphetamine, and some say nicotine. Yet none of these substances compete with the addiction faced by a vast majority of humans around the world, many of whom consider themselves to be drug free. What I'm referring to, of course, is our addiction to comfort. And no, that's not a street name for some new chemical cocktail, I'm referring literally to the feeling of being comfortable.

I used to be a liaison officer for a drug rehab center in Auckland called Higher Ground. I learned much about addiction there that would end up serving me well when it came to working with comfortable people. Why do drug users abuse substances? It's fairly simple, actually. They want to

feel good. Whether it's to avoid boredom, trauma, or some other form of emotional or mental pain, drugs are there to artificially generate a short-term sensation of feeling good; drugs create a brief escape from the suffering.

Before I started my psychology degree, I mistakenly believed that illicit drugs were chemicals that flowed through your body and made you feel a certain way. What actually happens is these drugs trigger your brain to release your own chemicals, such as serotonin and dopamine, in unusual amounts to create a surplus of emotional feeling or mental stimulation. Your own brain makes you feel high; the drugs simply give the command to begin the process.

Shooting up heroin is essentially no different than engaging in any other behavior that triggers feelings of comfort and safety (escape from pain). If you do something that generates a false sense of comfort in such a way as to guarantee you will also have to suffer later on, you are behaving exactly the same as a heroin addict. You are sacrificing long-term healthy and enjoyable sensations in payment for an immediate reward — an artificially generated pleasurable feeling. This is why I believe the pursuit of happiness is so dangerous; it encourages instant gratification behavior because every time you feel comfortable you'll assume you must be doing things "right."

My comfort-zone drug used to be validation. I would shoot up with people-pleasing behavior whenever I could. I had to start increasing the dose more and more as I grew older because I built up a tolerance. At first, a simple compliment used to get me through the day, but then I eventually got to the point where I needed ten separate pieces of recognition just to make it through to lunch. I needed to be seen as better, funnier, wiser, nicer. Every morning I would wake up with withdrawal — anxiety — and immediately start planning how to get my next hit.

Let's explore some common examples of fear and the addiction to comfort to help make more sense of this. Let's have a look at how mismanagement of fear and being an instant gratification junkie plays out in real-life scenarios.

Sticking with a Job You Hate

Most people I've asked would quit their jobs if they won the lottery. This is all I need to hear to believe that underneath all the excuses they tell themselves and others as to why they work where they do, the only real reason is financial security. There must not be a sufficiently compelling alternative reason for being there, otherwise they'd continue working long after taking out the jackpot. On that note, I assume people who enjoy their jobs are much less likely to buy lottery tickets too, though I have no evidence to support this.

Undertaking employment solely for financial security is all about feeling safe and in control. Most of us are raised to have deep and complex fears connected to money. I know that personally money has been one of my biggest nemeses, constantly being at the center of self-doubt, stress and poor decision making. Nothing, not even unfulfilled desires with women, has ruined my satisfaction in life more often than my reaction to concerns that I'm running out of money. On more occasions than I'd like to admit, I have sacrificed my values, desires and even connections with others in order to escape my fear of poverty.

For some this fear is too much to handle, so instead of pursuing a career where they can impact the world in a meaningful way through applying their talents and passions, they settle for something that will simply pay the bills. This is the equivalent of using methamphetamine to feel more secure in

social situations instead of actively pursuing a path of increased confidence and social leadership skills.

The illusion is two-fold. First, you believe that a paycheck can be guaranteed, and second, you believe this guaranteed paycheck will keep you feeling safe and secure. Both of these promises are misinformed lies, told to you by fear. Seriously, neither of them is true at all, and your faith in them is trapping you.

You only need to do a little online research to see that in these modern times there is no such thing as a guaranteed paycheck. Ask anyone who has been made redundant if they saw it coming when they first applied for the job. Too many employees believe that the company they work for actually cares about them and their long-term financial security. The harsh truth is that almost no one on the planet cares as much about your career than you do, and large companies will only ever view you as either an asset or a liability. Once you become the latter, there will be no protection, and you will be dropped without having a say in the decision. Just because it hasn't happened to you yet doesn't mean it will never happen, but this is the story you tell yourself to avoid acknowledging your irrational reactions to your fear of money.

I don't have the figures to back this up, but I am starting to believe that the idea that it's safer financially to be an employee than it is to be an entrepreneur might be becoming a myth. I have almost zero doubt that it is more financially dangerous to stay with a job you hate for the "guaranteed" paycheck than it is it to quit and pursue more satisfactory employment. If you find work you enjoy fully, you are more likely to perform well, and at least you'll have an advantage over those who are just there to cash in. Staying with a job you don't enjoy — just for the money — is the least logical career choice you can make, yet it would appear that a majority of people live this way (some even candidly admit they hate their jobs).

Regarding the second illusion, money will not make you secure, even though it appears to buy security. Sure, there are certain comforts that only can be purchased with money, but if you rely on external things to feel secure, you will always be at their mercy. If you need to be able to purchase certain things in order to feel safe, your sense of security is attached to external influences completely outside of your direct control — a strategy that is doomed. You'll already know it doesn't work because you never feel quite secure enough.

Putting it more specifically, if you need more than food and shelter to feel safe, you are emotionally insecure, and no amount of money in the world can make that go away. Money might temporarily remove the feeling of insecurity by replacing it with short-term comfort, but every time you have a payment you can't afford or a debt that seems too large, the insecurity will return as strong as ever. You will always be its bitch.

In the longer term, it's actually less risky to go for what you want. When you take yourself out of a situation where you've created a victim role for yourself, you will engage the problem-solving and powerful survival tools lying dormant in your brain. Simply put, you will find a way. This is what the explore stage is all about, figuring out long-term rewards by removing the restricting illusion of short-term comforts.

When it comes to planning your career, work backward from your values. Instead of trying to secure your finances, look for something that will satisfy you internally. You can figure out how to make money from pretty much any activity or product. It's really not that hard once you accept responsibility for figuring it out, but you cannot make a bad-fit job enjoyable even if you live by

values. Secure your satisfaction before you secure your bank account, or be forced to submit to a life of looking over your shoulder for the next financial threat, forever.

Being in a Bad Fit Relationship or Friendship

One of the biggest barriers to open curiosity in the social sphere is loneliness. I see thousands of people every year who are in friendships and relationships for unhealthy reasons, and they appear to almost always be driven by a sense of scarcity and their fear of abandonment. People have low standards far too often in relationships, sacrificing quality for quantity and the illusion of longevity, and it leads to more suffering than pleasure.

Like money, having a relationship appears to fill the neediness hole, at least temporarily, but in the end it leaves you unprotected against a million possible triggers to self-doubt. As a communal animal, most of your instinctual fears are about conformity and group acceptance, so allowing yourself to become attached to approval from others simply enables all of these fears to thrive and control you. Despite the obvious evidence that you can at least survive without the approval and love of others, you react to loneliness as if it's life-threatening.

Again, the fears around safety and comfort intervene, overriding your ability to respect yourself and demand high-quality connections in your life. People will often sacrifice their values in order to please someone enough to manipulate them into forming a committed bond of some kind. Look at it this way: every time you behave in a way that is driven by motives like "make him/her attracted to me," "keep the peace," or "avoid rejection," you are being controlled by fear. Let's look at how this plays out in real life.

You might pretend to feel happy all of the time to give people the impression that you're pleasant to be around. You might hold back on disagreeing with someone's beliefs so they feel you have something in common with them. You might pretend to enjoy activities they enjoy, even when you would much rather do something else. Sometimes you will even make huge, integrity-destroying sacrifices in order to keep someone close, doing things you don't want like having sex with someone you're not attracted to, living in a shitty environment, or even having children before you feel ready.

The foundation for this harmful and soul-destroying behavior appears to be based on the avoidance of loneliness. Many of my clients speak about being raised to believe that a person is not whole by themselves. Many of us are trained from an early age to seek that impossible concept of a never-ending romantic connection with another human. It's amazing that we never call bullshit on this, but then again, we've been conditioned all our lives to accept this as truth.

Think of every childhood fable that ends with "…and they lived happily ever after." The key message is they lived happily ever after; it's almost always they, isn't it? You never see a movie, fable or story aimed at children that ends with "…and she lived all by herself quite happily for many years, occasionally enjoying relationships as it suited her, but mostly just focusing on living by her values and making the most of life without requiring anyone else to secure her own sense of satisfaction and contentment." I wonder, how would the world be different if children received this kind of message? Parents, take note!

Start questioning where you learned that it is not OK to be alone. Even if you're currently in a committed relationship, start having a look at why you made the commitment. Was it only because you truly loved the person? Or was there a subtle influence in the back of your mind, particularly in the earlier stages of the relationship, that kept pushing you to make it work? Are you OK with losing

that person if it's best for both of you at some stage in the near future? Or are you terrified of being alone and believe you can make it work forever if you just try hard enough? Would you rather stick it out with who you have, even if it requires hiding who you really are, than risk rejection to create a higher-quality connection?

Many of the clients I work with, who are over the age of thirty and "still" single, complain about the amount of pressure they receive from their friends and family about finding a partner. It baffles me as to why their so-called loved ones put such toxic and unhealthy pressure on someone they are supposed to be supporting. How does it help a single person to be badgered with, "Why are you still single?" What good comes from projecting insecurity about loneliness onto someone you are supposed to care for?

So here we all are; being raised to believe it is some sort of life-failure to be alone, and then we all project this fear onto each other under the guise of support. The real question here is: does this help us? We must assess whether it helps us to believe it's wrong to be single. Using curiosity, we must question the truth of this belief. Why do we think it's bad to be single or alone?

And that's a key clarification. It's often deemed acceptable to feel lonely as long as you're not single, but it's still not OK to be single even if you don't feel loneliness. It's like saying it's better to be rich and miserable than poor and content. We have become so outcome-focused that we're willing to promote long-term misery in someone's life if it will get them an external result we approve of. We feel biased to see someone who is miserably married as more successful than someone who is contentedly single.

From what I've seen, it would appear primarily that we make a massive assumption that people in relationships are "happier" than people who are single. So we have a sequence of beliefs in our minds, which follows this pattern of assumptions:

a) IF people in relationships are happier than others and have the ability to be happy forever if they stay in the relationship and "make it work,"

b) THEREFORE it's better to be in a relationship than to be single, regardless of your own individual circumstances,

c) and OF COURSE pursuing the end goal of "happily ever after" is a healthy thing to do.

Are we so sure about all of these assumptions? Is the evidence strong enough to support such ideals?

Let's try looking at this concept through a different frame. What if you approached the whole idea of connections and relationships from the perspective of what is best for ME right NOW? If you let go for a moment of what society says you should want and instead refocus on what will suit you best in the present situation you're in, it probably will change everything. Perhaps we can remove the unhealthy fear-based pressure you feel to connect with anyone due to being single.

Here are some questions to help you figure out what is best for you right now.

1) How mentally and emotionally healthy are you when you're single?

This one is important because if you're bringing toxic baggage into a relationship, you will reduce the quality of life for the person you connect with. This would be an entirely harmful and selfish act on your part. If you have an emotional hole that you're looking to fill, you're never going to fill it by

using another person as validation. As my friend, Forge Your Life podcast host and social coach John Phu says, “It’s like trying to fill a cup that has holes in the bottom; you have to keep filling it forever.”

Before you bring someone else into your life, make sure you’re complete without them first. Create a lifestyle that suits you and fulfills your enjoyment of life completely. Engage in a range of hobbies and passions, and create a weekly routine that is self-sufficient. For a more practical guide on this, check out my first book The Legendary Life (www.amazon.com/Legendary-Life-Motivation-Confidence-Authentic-ebook/dp/B00TJFWJSS).

2) Are you able to enjoy outings by yourself, like going to dinner or traveling?

If you are unable to enjoy basic social situations without support from others, you probably suck value from those in your life without even realizing it. When I’m at a party with someone who does not feel secure being alone, I can feel the clinginess coming off them. It’s an uncomfortable suffocating feeling, like I might never get rid of them, and there is a sense of pending doom that sometime in the future they are going to ruin the party for me. If you trigger this feeling in your partner or friends, it will push them to either leave you or cheat. Even worse, if they enjoy your neediness, they are very unhealthy themselves and will probably use and abuse you in some way to gain a sense of control.

3) How do you currently manage your self-worth; have you let go of the need for validation and recognition from others?

Most people I’ve met require validation from others to feel good about themselves. Most people. I’m not exaggerating; I’ve met very few people who are completely self-sufficient in recognizing themselves and accurately measuring their worth based on living actively by their core values. If you enter a relationship with the need for your partner to “make you feel good,” you will become a leech who sucks at their soul until there’s nothing left.

Before you enter a committed relationship, use the principles of valued living and journaling to create and manage a system of high self-worth that is independent of feedback from others. Focus on becoming your own moderator before inviting someone to commit themselves to you, or else they might unwittingly take on that role without wanting to.

4) Why do you want a relationship?

We are somewhat repeating the same question over and over here, but we’re approaching it from different angles. As above, if you want a relationship to fill a needy hole inside yourself, that relationship is doomed to either fail or at least become miserable and difficult in the longer term. It’s time for you to find a healthy, value-based reason for getting into a relationship.

Perhaps it’s about enhancing someone else’s life by influencing them helpfully with your integrity. Maybe it’s about sharing a journey with someone so you are each better than you would be alone. Or possibly it’s just about experiencing and sharing as much love as you are capable of before you die.

5) Are you willing to lose someone at any time?

I’ve observed dozens of healthy relationships closely, and I see a common factor that is hidden underneath. The first time I saw it was when my best mate Brad described a discussion he’d had with his soon-to-be girlfriend. He had been dating her for a couple of weeks, and when it came time to have the “girlfriend/boyfriend talk,” he sat her down and explained his expectations. He told her clearly that there were a number of things about him that she would have to accept fully or else they

could not be in a relationship together. The key is that he was completely willing to lose her forever rather than compromise on those principles.

In all the healthiest, most loving and confident connections I see, the people involved are willing to lose their partner if that's what is required to maintain their values. This allows both people the freedom to be authentic and free of neediness. (Check out this article for more on this http://www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/what-women-really-want/).

Investment Balance

A simple starting point to analyze the level of healthiness in your current social connections is to look at investment balance. A healthy connection has an equal investment of energy, time, depth of vulnerability, compassion and respect from both parties while unhealthy relationships often have an imbalance in one or more of these areas. In unhealthy connections my clients experience I will commonly see that one person has more power than the other, cares less than the other, or there's some other sign of imbalance. Fortunately, you can manage this balance and in doing so sometimes even transform an unhealthy connection into a healthy one (or terminate it because the other person refuses to engage in being healthy).

For the first time ever I recently started working with a couple, coaching each of them separately. My job was not to try and fix their relationship, but instead to help them achieve an equal level of openness, trust and investment. In this case the woman was overinvesting and the man was not matching her. So we worked on helping him become more honest while helping her create a safe space and setting boundaries that encouraged him to step beyond his fear and comfort. They are currently taking a break from each to become healthier independently; not once did we try to make the relationship "work." All we focused on was equal investment.

When you look at your current connections, are they balanced? Does your partner, friend or family member give equally to what you give, and vice versa? Who does most of the talking, initiating and decision making? Does it feel fair? If you're concerned about balance, check out this post in the Brojo forum on Ending Unhealthy Connections and Relationships.
http://brojo.freeforums.net/thread/85/unhealthy-relationships-connections

This goes both ways obviously, and sometimes being the needy person in a relationship is hard to see clearly. I've had people tell me they feel their relationship with me is equal and balanced (in so many words), yet I'll feel that I am their counselor or helper without receiving anything in return. If you're generally needy in social connections, you will take more value than you give and you might not realize this is happening. Lack of self-awareness is the big curiosity problem at the beginning of neediness.

The solution is simple, yet challenging. You must talk openly and honestly about your connection with the other person. You need to share how you feel about the level of investment from both sides and then allow them to respond with their honest views as well. If you feel they take more than they give, you have to tell them that. If you worry that you are sucking value out of them, share this concern. Try to focus on evidence of measurable behavioral efforts, rather than getting lost in what you think you each do. Together, the two of you can explore the level of investment and get creative about how to rectify any imbalance. The other person being unwilling to engage in this conversation, despite repeated invitations, is a massive warning sign that you are in an unhealthy connection and I encourage you to end it immediately.

I had this experience myself recently. I was talking with my girlfriend, and we were sharing stories about our past. I can't remember how it came up exactly, but I asked her if she felt that she knew me as well as I knew her. I discovered that she felt that I knew more about her than she did about me, which I sensed made her feel vulnerably exposed and unsafe. So I responded by sharing a deep insecurity with her about how I had been a Nice Guy people-pleaser for most of my life and the pain this had caused me. I shared real-life examples and walked her through my history of being a passive, weak man. After sharing this I checked in with her again and she said that it felt like we were much closer to being equal. From here, I decided to initiate the Question Game…

The Question Game

There is a way to balance investment, deepen the connection, and learn more about each other without it having to be a serious high-pressure conversation. You can make it a game. Through making it a game, you can also train each other in how to communicate effectively, honestly and openly, and address issues in your communication with each other over time. The Question Game is one such way of doing it, and it's one of the few helpful and healthy things I retained from my years as a manipulative Pick Up Artist.

After my girlfriend and I played the question game, she said, "It feels like we've been together for a year." It was only the fourth time we'd spent time together, ever. This sense of deep connection came from a concentrated dose of vulnerability, honesty and playfulness — a drug-like cocktail of values, emotional sensations and captivated focus. I spoke earlier of my interpretation of the meaning of life — that it's a fascinating and endless exploration. More than anything else I've ever tried in a social setting, the Question Game aligns masterfully with this idea of an endless, fulfilling search.

The game is simple, and in my experience is best played with the frame of having fun and being playful. You can change or create rules for the game as you see fit, but the basic premise is taking turns to ask each other exploratory questions, and committing to answer them as honestly as you can. I recommended you definitely apply those two rules at least, as they are the very foundation of the game.

Other rules can be brought in to resolve your own unique communication difficulties, like "no interrupting an answer" or "we have to touch each other after every answer to show how we feel about it." You can really have some fun with this! My favorite rule is "you cannot ask a question that has already been asked." Then you both end up asking the questions you don't want to have to answer. (Beginner's tip: make sure you're the first one to ask, "How many people have you slept with?")

Allow the game to play out naturally, taking twists and turns, becoming massively unpredictable as it rolls on. I've been asked all manner of questions playing this game, from "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" (stole money from my parents when I was fourteen), to whether I've ever had a gay experience (kissed a guy when I was about seven years old), to what I find most attracted about the questioner. I even had one girl asking about the size of my penis (it was her second question, which I believe was simply because she didn't want to appear impolite by asking on the first round).

You must be as honest as possible when you answer and when you ask. You must ask questions you want to know the answer to. This game is not just about exploring. It also trains you in courage, honesty and abundance. Why abundance? Because to play this game fully, you must be willing to

scare them away with the truth. You must play the game as if you will never see them again, with complete honesty and shamelessness. If you do, they will follow your example, and possibly the deepest connection you've ever experienced will begin to take form.

Don't be too surprised when you play this game with someone you're attracted to and it ends in sex. Most of the time the delay between meeting someone you're attracted to and having sex with them is just about fear of the unknown and social rules. You're already attracted to each other, so the question about whether to have sex is mostly about safety. When you play the Question Game, everything unknown is bought out into the light. This game is like an aphrodisiac to people who are attracted to each other, as equally as it is a repellent to people who are a bad fit.

And one last special note to guys who play this with girls. Don't hold back. You give a female this opportunity to explore your hidden depths and she will go to town! Make sure you give back with equal passion and ferocity because to maintain a balanced investment, each partner must contribute to the same degree.

Chapter Eleven: The Problem with Social Goals

Applying curiosity via the Explore phase of The 3X Model is particularly important in the social sphere. I see the lack of curiosity and openness destroying interactions and eventually eroding potentially powerful relationships. On the other hand, when I observe someone being open-minded, interested and presently focused during an interaction, the likelihood of a quality connection increases tenfold.

What does it mean to be curious in a social interaction? As is my wont, to begin exploring this concept let's first have a look at what it means to lack curiosity — to neglect the Explore phase — during an interaction. This can happen in a number of ways, all of which have a single theme in common. You're trying to figure out the right thing to say or do. Of course, there's only one reason you would feel pressured to say or do the right thing. You're attached to a future outcome.

HOW GOALS RUIN CONNECTIONS

In most areas of life, having a goal can be used to support your values, as we've discussed in detail throughout this book. The problem that comes with applying goals to social interactions is the same problem as applying goals anywhere else. It can create an attachment to outcomes. Most people have goals in their minds when they speak with you, yet very few of these people are basing these goals on their values. Mostly, they are trying to get something from you… and you are trying to get something from them. This is often called a transactional conversation.

You know that feeling you get when a person with a clipboard and lanyard swinging from their neck approaches you while you're walking down the street? They have a big smile on their face and seem to be interested in you, yet something just feels wrong. You immediately get overtaken by defensiveness and become on-guard. There's something about them that tells you they are going to try and take something from you. You just know it, even though they haven't said a word yet.

This feeling is what happens when someone in an interaction lacks genuine curiosity. You can feel they have a plan, an agenda, and they are going to stick to that plan regardless of what you do. When the salesperson hears you say, "No thanks," they don't really listen to this. They just switch tactics to find a way around the obstacle you have created. They are so obsessed with getting your money, they have no compassion for your obvious signs of discomfort or even signs that you want them to try to understand you better first. Simply put, they are so obsessed with their outcome they no longer give a fuck about you. All empathy has gone, and all that remains is their hungry neediness.

If you enter an interaction with the aim of getting something from the other person, you will trigger that defensive feeling in them. They may not always be able to clearly express why they feel suspicious and defensive. It will be more instinctual. Pick Up Artists, sales people and other trained manipulators will try to mask their intention to get something from you through psychological snares, tricks, and distractions, but underneath it all you'll still feel that uneasy suspicion that something is being stolen from you. You can feel their strategy.

Marketing theorists and Pick Up Artists use a term called "buyer's remorse," which describes the regret and change of heart someone has after buying a product or initially feeling warm toward you. When someone is given space to think and digest after your interaction with them, any tricks they

fell for become apparent and they end up resenting you and themselves for this. In other words, this might be why that guy at the party who seemed to love you isn't texting back.

You can trick people into thinking you aren't trying to get something from them, but this is usually just a temporary illusion. The truth is soon revealed. Trying to get something will only provide short-term rewards at best and will almost always end with a disconnection, which means loneliness and neediness. It's quite a vicious cycle really, and it's exactly what trapped me in the Pick Up paradigm for so long. I wrote about my experiences here: www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/why-pua-doesnt-work/.

For now, I want you to just reflect on what you try to get when you interact with people. Is it approval and validation? Do you try to be impressive so they will like you? Do you deliberately manipulate them into feeling certain "positive" emotions in your presence? Or even "negative" emotions so that they'll notice you? Are you constantly planning your next move to support an end goal?

All of these intentions will be felt by the other person, which creates a disconnect and ruins your chances of building a healthy genuine bond with them. I want you to open your mind to the idea that perhaps building a connection is not something you get. It is in fact something you give and receive.

WORRYING WHAT THEY THINK OF YOU (MIND READING)

The biggest obstacle to present curiosity, in any situation, is worrying. When you are trying to avoid painful future outcomes, or when you are simply drowning in anxiety because you believe you can't avoid them, you are not present. You are drifting away to a make-believe world that causes you to feel nervous, and the other person will feel that distance. You just aren't here.

You know the feeling. You're speaking to someone and they're nodding and making the appropriate noises, yet you know they are not "there" with you. They have traveled somewhere else in their mind, while leaving behind a dull representative to keep you occupied. This can make you feel alone when surrounded by others, particularly if you have a predisposition toward introversion. What we often don't realize is that these people are not ignoring us because we're boring or unattractive. Most of the time they're actually lost in a sea of insecurity.

I spent a majority of my life concerned about only one thing — what other people thought of me. My entire existence was basically dedicated to ensuring that people only thought positive things about me, all of the time. As I write this it amazes me to think I ever believed such a task was possible. It seems so ridiculous now to think I once believed I could control the thoughts and feelings of every single person I ever met. Yet that is exactly what I believed; I "knew" it to be true.

To this day it still affects me, as the programming remains underneath the improvements I've made over the years. Just this day I received my first one-star review on Amazon.com for my first book The Legendary Life. I could feel a strong compulsion to challenge it and defend myself, but I know this only comes from insecurity (I know this because I feel no need to challenge a five-star review). What is different now compared to my past is that I am able to see past my neediness and realize it's fine for someone to dislike me or my work.

You've probably been in non-present interactions many times before; you're talking to someone but you're not really listening or paying full attention. While they are responding to you, you are busy

planning. You've made an assessment about how you think they feel about you, and now you're strategically crafting your next move to improve the likelihood they will feel pleasure in relation to you. Instead of being genuinely curious about what they think or how they feel, you make massively biased assumptions, believe those assumptions, and then start to panic as you struggle to come up with a suitable response.

MIND READING

Mind reading is the practice of guessing what is happening inside someone else by observing the clues they give you with body language, voice tone, choice of words, and other subtle messaging. Rather than outright asking them, or sharing your assumptions honestly to allow them to be challenged, you make your assumption secretly and stick with it. You are so sure of your ability to read minds that you never stop to think, "Wait, what if I'm wrong?"

There's a story I often tell my clients about this. When I worked in Corrections, I was often alongside the top psychologists in the country. Their job was to predict how dangerous certain high-risk offenders in prison would be if they were to be released. The psychologists would complete up to twelve hours of intensive interviewing, followed by in-depth case reviews, application of psychometric tools and tests, and even interviews with family and friends. They sought as much information as possible to determine the risk. Yet even after all of this thorough research, usually the best they could report back would be a formal version of: "He'll probably do something bad pretty soon." They would almost never be able to say for sure what the offender would do unless he was highly predictable due to solid patterns of behavior over time.

This just goes to show; if the most highly trained and experienced psychologists in the world still hedge their bets about their ability to accurately assess someone, despite having access to scientifically validated tools, and they hold back on making predictions even after verifying and testing their highly trained instincts, why are you so certain you're getting it right every time with your wild, untrained and untested guesses?

Worrying what someone thinks of you is perfectly natural. We all do it. This skillset can at times be remarkably helpful and was almost certainly a requirement for survival in our past. If the tribe was turning against you without letting you know, you could save yourself some serious pain by being able to read it on their faces and through their actions. But few of us live in isolated tribes anymore where you require the others' approval for survival. You can now happily hold down a job and provide yourself with food and shelter without requiring anyone to like you. So why do we still care what others think?

Even if the skill of mind reading is no longer a requirement for survival, it will still be thousands of years before the trait wears off. Evolution is simply not that fast. And this probably won't even happen because the mind reading trait still sometimes comes in handy today. We can see it contribute to the relative success of numerous people; it will be quite tricky to become the President of the United States, Mafia Boss or an effective grief counselor if you are completely unable to guess what others are thinking.

The trouble with mind reading is our complete certainty in it. You are probably getting it wrong most of the time, or at least often enough to ruin your ability to make informed decisions, which ultimately reduces your satisfaction with life and your ability to create rewarding social connections. The likelihood that you are able to accurately identify the complex inner workings of another

human's mind through a completely untrained analysis of unreliable signals is very low indeed. Put it this way, can you even explain how your own mind works? If you think your own brain is complicated, why do you presume you can understand someone else's?

Further, your guess-work is significantly hindered by fear-based cognitive biases — the ultimate distraction. If you have self-worth issues, you will be more likely to guess that people are thinking negative things about you, even if there is a complete lack of valid evidence. If you are judgmental, you will assume people have harmful motives, when in reality very few people are likely to be thinking "I'm going to deliberately be an asshole." Your preconceptions very rarely provide up-to-date accurate information.

Worrying what others think is a process you don't choose to engage in. It happens automatically. Most likely, "worrying" is an unconsciously prompted reaction, based on instinctual fears and the brain patterns we have, which are designed for safety. But this doesn't mean you're powerless to do anything about it.

You can pay attention and notice when it's happening. You can ask yourself, "Where's the undeniable evidence for this assumption?" before you believe your guesses. You can choose to be more curious and ask the person what they're really thinking. Why leave it up to chance? You know you at least occasionally must get it wrong, so start testing your assumptions to figure out when you are blind to the truth.

After thousands of hours coaching clients, I often find my guesses about what they are thinking are accurate, because I frequently ask my clients to challenge my assumptions. But even with my perception that I have a high success rate with mind reading I still choose to challenge it as regularly as I can, because I know my brain cannot be trusted. Getting it wrong even once can lead to massive miscommunication issues and conflicts. It's worth the effort to swallow my ego and allow myself to occasionally be proven wrong. It's what I would expect a confident person to accept about themselves.

LETTING GO OF YOUR SHITTY STRATEGY

These issues raise an important concept for confidence building — experimenting with something even though it feels wrong.

When you've been applying the same strategy for a number of years and life still isn't going as well as you'd like then your current strategy sucks. You might feel that trying to get something while worrying what others think is the right thing to do, yet at the same time maybe you realize it is not actually working for you as an overall strategy. Perhaps it's time to try something that is going to feel wrong. We must at least try this when what feels right hasn't measurably worked. If your strategy is shitty, it might be time for something weird.

In my Nice Guy days, my social strategy was based firmly on achieving a goal (make them like me) and worrying about what they think (to prevent them from disliking me). I applied this strategy for over twenty-five years, hoping it would provide a way to finally feel connected to others. If it wasn't working, I simply did more of it. I was even nicer and worried even more, each day, hoping that one day I would cross some critical mass tipping point and it would all finally start working. It took twenty-five years to realize that it had never worked at all.

This realization was as painful as it was ironic; worrying what others thought and trying to make them like me only left me with a feeling of complete isolation. It baffles me sometimes to wonder, how did I allow this strategy to continue for so long? As a recent client simply put it, “I’ve never known any other way.” Now I’m asking you; what shitty strategy are you still committed to even though it has never really worked? Take some time to think this through, because at first your fear will avoid acknowledging it.

In the Nice Guy days, when I was alone with my best friend, I would feel calm, playful, and genuinely curious, even during my darkest days of people-pleasing. But you put me in a crowd, or around new people I was unfamiliar with, and I would completely transform. In those situations, I always reacted with the same strategy. I would think, “It’s time to go to work.” I would put away my calmness, playfulness and curiosity, and replace these with a performance-frame of seriousness, carefulness and hidden strategies.

I would subconsciously become hypersensitive to the facial expressions and body language cues of others and would then go to work convincing and manipulating each individual into validating me, while simultaneously lying to myself about it. Usually it was about making them laugh. On those rare occasions when I felt this strategy had been totally successful, I might relax briefly, but it would only be a matter of time before my neediness was triggered and it was time to go back to work. I would yet again put aside my values in order to follow my shitty strategy.

It’s interesting how long it took for me to make the connection in my mind. Here I was with my best friend, totally at ease and enjoying life to the fullest, and I was clearly behaving differently with him than I was around others with whom I felt so isolated. Yet I had made the incorrect assumption that the only reason I felt comfortable being myself around him was because we had built a connection. It wasn’t until my late twenties that I realized I had been looking at it backward. Being shamelessly myself around him is what created the connection in the first place!

If you don’t feel deeply and meaningfully connected to the world and the people in your life, your strategy for connecting with people is not working. Simple as that. Which is why I would suggest you re-ignite the value of curiosity and ask yourself, “Is there another way?” If you are not regularly asking this question — in all the areas of your life — you are neglecting the Explore phase of The 3X Model and refusing to live by the value of curiosity. And that’s why your strategy is outdated and ineffective; you haven’t been adapting or improving.

You’re stuck!

APPLYING CURIOSITY

Trying to achieve a goal means you risk reducing curiosity. Worrying what others are thinking of you also blocks genuine exploration. So what’s the alternative? Let’s begin by simply exploring the opposite of these strategies.

Trying to get and worrying what others think both have something in common; they are based on external measures. They both involve allowing your values to be influenced and compromised by something outside yourself, and they are both distant from current reality (the present moment). You’re focused on the future projection of your relationship with this person and predicting how they are going to behave rather than just being with them here and now, enjoying their company.

Applying curiosity means coming back to reality. You need to be present to build a real connection, so before you decide what you're going to say next in a conversation, you need to answer some important questions about reality. Don't worry. You don't have to go through these questions each and every time you say something, but it's a good place to start.

Question 1: Have I been paying attention?

In the Release phase of The 3X Model, you will be listening attentively without judgment, waiting for them to finish expressing themselves, before you decide what you're going to do next (more on this in the third book of the series). If you've already decided on your next move before they have finished expressing themselves, you are not living by the value of respect. You're also quite likely to miss the point they are trying to get across because you've been distracted by your assumptions.

This means whatever you express in return will not be based on the truth. Instead it will be derived from goals, worries, and the assumptions you make in relation to your needy strategy. Stop! Revisit what they said, in your mind, and how they said it, or ask them to repeat themselves. Express honestly that you got caught up in your thoughts while they were speaking and would like another chance to hear them out, without all that annoying insecurity. I can say personally I feel no offense when someone says "Can you please say that again? I got lost in my own thoughts for a minute there."

Question 2: Where is the measurable evidence?

You might see someone frown after you've finished speaking, and your not-so-accurate mind reading tells you, "They are angry at me." Instead of just believing this thought, you can ask your brain to provide evidence for the assumption. You can quickly come to realize that a frown is hardly reliable proof and you're going to need more than that to come to a valid conclusion.

This prompts you to ask the person, "Hey, when you frowned I assumed you were angry at me. Am I right about that?" Talking about the evidence you see in a conversation makes for some pretty interesting conversations as well! It's a lot more fascinating to explore how you affect each other than it is to make generic comments about the weather.

Question 3: What is the truth inside me right now?

Quite often, a subset of worrying what others think of you manifests as pressure about what to say next. Because you have the goal of making them approve of you, painful pressure is applied to come up with something brilliant, interesting, and effective. You rack your brain trying to decide on the best move, and while you're planning and scheming your attention flies thousands of miles away from the actual interaction. The good news is you always have something good to say… if you're willing to be vulnerably and shamelessly honest.

At any given time, you are experiencing a range of thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. While the other person is talking — assuming you actually listen — their words and body language will become a catalyst for your own sensations, memories, stories, dreams, assumptions, thoughts, beliefs and emotional waves. At any point in time you are consciously drowning in dozens of things to talk about, all of which reflect the true nature of who you are and are things that will fascinate most people, particularly people who are an authentic fit for you.

These all make for interesting conversation because humans can relate to being human! So while you're digging around for the best thing to say, you're missing out on the rich information right there in your mind. Tell them about what was triggered in you, how it feels, and what you think about how

it feels. You'll never need to come up with something "good" to say ever again. The added bonus is that this kind of honesty will either drive them away (bad fit) or draw them into a deep connection (good fit), saving you the effort of trying to balance the investment levels.

At first this will be difficult. You'll feel like you don't have the language to explain your thoughts and other internal sensations accurately. I can't tell you what to say because I have no idea what's true for you in any given moment. But it's OK; this is essentially a new language you're learning. Unlike foreign spoken languages, you don't have to get this one right, and no one else can teach it to you. Just try your best to describe what you are experiencing as accurately as you are capable of right now, and the person you're speaking to will feel that sincerity.

LET GO OF GETTING IT RIGHT

Following from that last point, getting stuck trying to figure out the right thing to say comes from attaching shame to the internal sensation of confusion. In this case, confusion is when you do not feel that you completely understand what is happening inside you. Most people wait until they've "figured out" their thoughts or feelings before they express themselves. They fear they will not be able to accurately put their internal sensations into acceptable words, so they try to get it right before they express themselves. This is one way of sharing with others.

The other way is to say "fuck it" and just show them what you've got in its rawest form.

Imagine that the expression you make is a meal in a restaurant. What most people do is serve their words and actions like a carefully prepared and fully completed meal with all the trimmings. Preparing this "meal" causes overthinking because it has to please the customer. True vulnerability means taking the customer out the back to the kitchen to see the meal being prepared before even you, as the chef, knows how it will turn out. You can start speaking before you know what you're going to say (you'll observe this is probably what you already do with your closest friends).

Curiosity isn't about finding the right thing to say. It's about realizing the truth in the moment as best you can. Instead of allowing yourself to be controlled by the thought of "I can't think of the right thing to say, so I'll wait until I get something good," you can choose to let the other person see this thought process taking place. You can say things like, "I'm so nervous right now that my mind is racing to come up with something good to say." This is like cooking the meal in front of their eyes.

See what I mean when I say you always have something interesting to talk about? Even if you don't understand what the hell is going on inside that crazy mind of yours, you can still have a go at expressing this confusion. You have to sacrifice your need to polish it up, or to deliver it in a final, completely understandable form. You just need to be bold enough to show them the incomplete draft. If they're the right fit for you, they will resonate deeply with it and show compassion, empathy, and interest.

I should clarify here. This is not the same as just blurting out any crazy shit that comes into your head. Most often, the initial thoughts you have in reaction to someone else are based on prejudice, bias and bullshit. Curiosity is patient; curiosity takes its time to figure out what the closest thing to reality might be, which is different from trying to come up with something good to say. There's a fine line between impulsive reactions and overthinking paralysis. Training yourself to be more curious is about learning to walk that line. It will take time and practice.

In a conversational context, you can do this by simply revealing the raw process of your mind as it unfolds. I like to think of it as opening up my forehead so that you can watch my brain at work. I was feeling insecure with my girlfriend the other day because I mind read her distracted facial expression as being some vague form of dislike toward me. I knew this was probably just a biased mind read based in fear, but I wasn't really sure what was going on inside me. Instead of waiting to figure it out, I told her what I knew so far, as best I could.

"Hey, sometimes I get this insecurity thing where I assume you're upset with me. I think this is because so many of my previous girlfriends dumped me without warning and I find it hard to trust commitment. Maybe I've become overly sensitive to changes in behavior. I think that's what might be happening right now. There's nothing I want you to do about it. I'm just making sure I stay honest with you."

She responded by reassuring me that her facial expression was actually connected to stressful thoughts unrelated to me, and that she also has a similar insecurity. I assume she shared with me because my rawness allowed her to feel safe. When you're curious, you remove judgment and become accepting. The person you're engaging with will feel this overall acceptance and see proof of it in your shameless expression of confusion, which will help them to feel safe to open up more to you. This is how a connection is allowed to flourish; acceptance and safety fertilize the soil for connections to grow.

In conclusion; if you're feeling isolated or disconnected, there's a pretty good chance you've been neglecting open curiosity. You've made assumptions instead of looking for evidence and challenging yourself. You're seeking to achieve a goal rather than become interested in the other person or in the present moment. And you're worrying about their thoughts instead of asking about them. You are disconnecting yourself without even needing to!

Bring back your curiosity to enjoy the surprising and rewarding connections it creates.

Chapter Twelve: Escape from Fantasy World

Essentially this entire book is about a single battle — the fight between consciousness and subjective reality. Curiosity is the vehicle that transports you from the subjective reality you've created in your mind, an almost entirely fictional account of the evidence presented to you, to the reality that exists outside of your mind — the conscious space we all share.

We might never know exactly what consciousness is because at this time it seems impossible to completely remove human biases from observations. Even in a controlled study, a person has to look at the study eventually to describe its meaning, and then biases come in to ruin objectivity. Even peer reviewers can be biased heavily.

In the early 1900s, sister Elizabeth Kenny is reported to have figured out a better treatment for polio than what was available at the time, and essentially founded physiotherapy. But at the time, the entire global community of doctors refused to accept it and continued disfiguring their patients for many years with barbaric leg-restraints. Even the most qualified and educated amongst us can stray away from reality due to the pride our subjective mind shows us. We can certainly always make a stronger effort toward getting in touch with reality, which as I've said before is a core principle to creating a confident mindset.

So it makes sense in this final chapter that we step back and explore, at a higher level, the distance we create between these dual realities. On one hand, you have the story you tell yourself about what is real, and on the other you have the hard evidence presented to your senses, as viewed within your conscious awareness. Everything to do with exploration is about viewing the world as truthfully as possible for a human being. You can never really be too curious (though of course staying in Explore phase for too long may mean that you are stuck).

THOUGHTS

Your subjective reality is presented to you almost exclusively in the form of thoughts. Curiosity, therefore, is mostly about exploring your thoughts to filter out as much bullshit as possible before moving forward to the Engage phase of The 3X Model (i.e., finalizing your decision and taking action). One of the most detrimental things you can do to curiosity is to believe your thoughts. I'll say that again; believing that your thoughts are true is your biggest barrier to accepting reality.

Imagine how many different thoughts you have every day. Hundreds? Maybe even thousands? Extrapolate that out; how many different thoughts have you had in your entire life? It must number in the billions. What do you think the odds are of those thoughts each being entirely true and accurate? If you have some rational sense, you'll probably identify that at least a few of them were completely fictional.

But… what if they were all fictional?

When your brain/mind transmits thoughts into your conscious awareness, it's rare for you to question them. You make a subconscious assumption that every thought has already been carefully critiqued by some reliable part of your brain, and therefore is the absolute truth. For example, you might look at a person for the first time and your mind immediately, out of nowhere, says, "He's definitely a loser." You don't even bother to investigate further; you simply avoid talking to him

forever. You trust your mind knows what it's talking about. You might even have a little story to back this up, like "…because he's wearing sunglasses indoors." No reliably valid evidence. Just a story.

This is the issue I see restraining most people, crippling their ability to take action and ruining their chances at a meaningful connection with others and the world around them. The lack of critical thinking about our own thoughts leads us to believe whatever nightmare fiction our brain can generate. It's the equivalent of being in a dream without knowing you are dreaming. You simply believe whatever your mind spews up because you can't imagine that your own brain would lie to you. But it does.

It always does.

By now I hope you've accepted the concept that a human brain cannot be relied on for objectivity. Every experience you've ever had, every influential person and moment in your life, every memory, prediction and filtered understanding biases your perception of reality. If you were neglected as a child, you'll probably be less trusting than others. If you had great success in your first attempt at public speaking, you'll be less likely than others to see it as a terrifying experience. If you were spoiled with gifts as a child, you'll have a heightened sense of entitlement.

Millions of tiny variables affect you every day of your life, creating new cognitive pathways and filters in your brain, changing your reality. Essentially, your reality is you; you are your reality. And you are constantly changing and updating, adapting. Or are you? How curious have you been? To place blind faith in the accuracy of thoughts is a misguided and delusional practice indeed. Believing any one thought is as dangerous as waking up from a dream and believing it actually happened.

This genuinely has happened to me before. I once had a dream where a friend of mine was raped. In the dream I was told who the guy was and where he lived. I awoke in a semi-dazed rage and started planning how to track the guy down and beat him to a pulp with a cricket bat. I was almost getting up to do it before I realized the entire experience had been a dream. What damage might I have done if I had never had the realization that my dream wasn't real? What damage are you doing right now to your life because you believe your thoughts are real?

Conscious awareness is still largely a mystery to the human race. It is difficult to pinpoint with any certainty the benefits for us in being aware of our existence. Plenty of other animals and living things seem to survive quite well without conscious thought (in the form that humans experience), while others like dolphins, primates and some birds also share our questionable gift of awareness. Regardless of what consciousness is exactly, or what purpose it serves, one thing is for sure — it is not a source of objectivity. It is merely a space where thoughts take place, like actors on a stage.

You may halfway agree with this concept, in that you believe some thoughts are real while others are nonsense. In a Brojo session this week, I asked the group to give me an example of a real thought, a thought they were certain was true and accurate. Ivan, one of the Brojo Captains said, "I know that this is a wooden table," pointing to the table we were sitting around.

I immediately dived on him. "How are you so sure this is wood and not a plastic veneer? Why is it a 'table' and not a collection of wooden planks? If we were all to sit on it like a chair, would it still be a table? If I threw it in the ocean and rode upon it, would it not become a 'raft' instead?"

It was only a table with certainty because the senses of his eyes (seeing the table) and touch (feeling it with his hands), which is a collection of pieces of evidence, were grouped together by his brain into the category of Tables. If I raised him from birth to categorize such items as Benches or Dining Equipment, he would likely not have called it a table. Yet, because of his upbringing and

conditioning, he was certain it was a table. He believed his thought without question, despite the fact that the item in question could be categorized as many different things depending on context and — more importantly — who the observer was.

Now to be fair, thinking of a wooden object as a table is probably a helpful thing to do. It saves him having to re-identify common objects all day long, which would be a monstrously time-consuming task. This is likely why we have the ability to create categories — stereotypes — such as these. But there are other, more sinister thoughts, which end up being quite unhelpful once we believe them with certainty. While believing that a collection of wood is a table is hardly going to ruin your life, some of the other thoughts you currently believe almost certainly will.

Some of the most harmful thoughts and patterns you have — when talking about confidence — are those that derive from the belief system "I'm not good enough." Let's have a closer look at this particular bias.

THE "I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH" STORY

This story is a great example of a strong and rigid identity belief system that you follow automatically, without even being aware of it most of the time. Like calling a collection of wood "a table," many people call a collection of negative thoughts "I'm not good enough." And then they believe it. Do you?

That hesitation you feel about asking someone out, applying for a promotion, or any other "high risk" activity with the possibility of rejection attached to it is derived in some way from a part of your brain that believes you are not worthy. I see people believing and obeying the thoughts stemming from this belief without question, leading to people missing out on one opportunity after another and generally feeling anxious a lot of the time.

In objective reality, you are just another human being, another creature on Earth, and the Universe doesn't feel anything toward you. You are neither worthy nor unworthy, neither good nor bad, for the Universe does not have such measurements available. As one notable online blogger, Johnny B. Truant, famously quipped: "The Universe does not give a flying fuck about you." (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13628888-the-universe-doesn-t-give-a-flying-fuck-about-you). The idea that you are unworthy is an entirely fictional human construct based on a set of rules that do not exist. Yet you follow these rules as if they are the immutable laws of physics. This is because you've been conditioned by others who believe them too.

It's impossible for you to explore openly and be genuinely curious if you live in a fantasy world where you're "not good enough." This alternative reality harms every decision you'll ever make and reduces you to a beggar, waiting for the Universe to condescendingly hand you the odd morsel of contentment. But you're not to blame for having this belief or being affected by it.

First, as I mentioned earlier, blame is completely pointless and counterproductive — an escape path for those refusing to take responsibility for their lives. Second, the I'm not good enough story started early, from a time in childhood where you didn't have a chance to think critically and question it because your brain had not yet fully developed that skill. You're a victim of this mindset, though that is no excuse for allowing yourself to keep believing something so incredibly false.

Perhaps you had neglectful, irate or nasty parents. Maybe you were bullied in school. Even a tiny incident like getting a B+ when you expected an A can be devastating, as it plants a seed of doubt

about your worthiness. Without wise intervention from confident adults, that seed will grow, fed by the confirmation bias that rules your brain.

You started, as a baby, with a little doubt about your worth, but then your risk-averse brain started actively seeking proof that you are the loser you suspect yourself to be. Little by little, the evidence accumulated; a bad grade here, a refused date offer there, and before you know it, you have come to the firm belief that you are not good enough, despite objective reality having no such measurement.

This belief was the system that required the most work in my own mind. Nearly every harmful behavior I ever engaged in can be linked back to believing the I'm not good enough story, in my own mind at least. I would overachieve in order to prove to myself and others that I was competent. I made sure to promote myself in a way that manipulated others into feeling obliged to give me recognition (e.g. sulking). I avoided being honest about my intentions and sexual desires to avoid rejection. I procrastinated on tasks I thought were difficult. All of this, without exception, was directly driven by a belief that I was doomed to eventually fail because, underneath it all, I was not good enough.

I have come to accept that I might never be completely rid of this belief system. I was conditioned toward this from a very early age, due to a number of small but significant influences, and the programming is deeply written into the very core of my psyche. I can feel it in there every time I take a risk or consider putting myself "out there." A voice still whispers, "You'll probably fuck this up like everything else." At first I obeyed the voice like a passive slave. Then, I hid from the voice behind humor, substances and busyness. Finally, I stood up to fight the voice to try and destroy it with positive affirmations and achievements. But none of these strategies worked.

Luckily, there was something else I could try.

FINDING REALITY

What this all comes down to is a simple misunderstanding. None of the thoughts you have can be held to account for your behavior. Sure, the voice telling you that you're not good enough is strong, almost unavoidable. But the thought is not a command, and it's absolutely crucial that you know the difference. In the end, for you to behave in a way that makes the thought true, you first had to decide that you believed it. Thoughts do not control your behavior, but you delegate control to them consciously when you choose to believe they are true. And you don't actually have to do this.

You have five physical senses, and another more obscure inner sense as well, call it the sixth sense, consciousness or the Observer. At any given time, each of these senses is tuned into certain stimuli, both from within and without your body, and each is ready to provide you with a wealth of information about reality.

Whenever you feel attached to a thought, tempted to believe its whisperings, you need only to reach out to any of your other senses and you will receive additional, often conflicting, information. In other words, your senses can help you get back to reality, reducing the need for you to believe a single thought.

Let's say I see a woman I'm attracted to and feel a deep, value-based impulse telling me, "You could have a chance to connect with her." Then, let's say a powerful, commanding and terrifying inner voice immediately overrides this initial impulse, telling me, "She won't like you; she's too busy to talk

right now; she's out of your league; she's probably got a boyfriend," and so on. The not good enough radio station is on full volume, due to fear.

I'm now at a crossroads; I can accept the voice in my head as being the truth, which would delegate power over my behavior to this voice, ending up with me standing there and staring at her without taking a risk. Or, I could show myself that these thoughts are not the entirety of reality by checking out what my other senses are telling me about the present-moment reality.

So I search my sensory awareness. First, and most obvious, is the Observer inside my head. He tells me that I'm having "I'm not good enough" thoughts as well as a sinking feeling in my stomach and shrinking feeling in my balls. OK fine, that's part of the picture. And, I ask myself internally, what else is there?

That's when I notice the pressure of the ground on my feet, the heat building up inside my shoes, and a slight aching in my left calf muscle. Interesting. It seems the I'm not good enough party just let in a couple more guests. I search for more. Now I notice the bright lights reflecting off a nearby car window. I feel the breeze on the back of my neck as my sweat cools. I notice a residual taste of sashimi in my mouth.

The thoughts and associated emotional sensations are still there, only now there are others as well. The reality-picture has widened considerably to accommodate them. At no time have I hidden from the thoughts, fought against them, or even tried to replace them. I am not even attempting to distract myself from the thoughts by exploring other sensations. Indeed, my thoughts are as relevant as any other stimuli and must be included on the overall canvass of reality.

As I explore other senses and add them to the thoughts and feelings of pending rejection, I realize something important. A thought is just a thought; it's a tiny particle of the overall sensation of being alive. So why did it seem so overwhelming, so real, earlier, as if it was the entirety of reality and not just a tiny part of it?

Because I had zoomed in.

In my study of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) I discovered the powerful concept of defusion. This describes the process of zooming out from a painful thought or feeling by allowing more stimulation to enter your conscious awareness. We don't run away from the thoughts. We accept them, but as part of a much larger picture. Defusion can be learned and then mastered with months of meditation and other forms of consciousness-awareness development, but you can effectively try it out right now — without requiring training — through asking yourself a simple question.

"What else is there?"

Believing that a thought or feeling is true simply indicates that you have zoomed in so far as to allow it to consume your entire awareness. You cannot see the woods for the single tree you've pressed your nose up against. This does not mean the tree is more real than the rest of the forest, and yet you can only see a single tree, so how could you know what else is out there? We do this all the time with negative thoughts and painful feelings. We get so close to them that they seem to be all that is real, leaving us powerless and without options.

When you notice yourself becoming attached to any particular thought or feeling, all you have to do is repetitively answer the question What else is there? In doing so you engage the value of curiosity and allow your mind to become aware of other stimuli. Every time you zoom in on a thought and

turn it into a fictional reality, you can zoom out again by cycling through your senses. What feelings are you having? Where are they in the body? What can you smell, see, hear and taste?

The fucked up thing about all of this is that those painful thoughts and feelings are actually helpful to a certain point. Your self-doubt and worthiness issues really just stem from risk assessment and avoidance. Your brain is constantly seeking dangers and threats to your survival. Then it presents these in your conscious awareness. The thought might appear to be "She's out of your league," but what your brain is really trying to say is just "Be careful." There's nothing wrong with that advice.

I recently had an article written about the Brojo group I run by a feminist reporter. She was not overly kind in her assessment, and I noticed my reaction was largely insecure. After reading her article I started to doubt my own practice as a coach and community-creator. But after I discussed these insecurities with my friend Mike I realized that having such insecurities was actually helpful. It made me double-check everything I teach, constantly seek new and better ways to improve my practice, and invite others to challenge me. (You can check out this article here: www.thewireless.co.nz/articles/no-more-mr-nice-guy.)

Language plays a huge role in the way you see reality. Like mathematics is the language of physics, words are the language of your perspective. When mathematics says "x = 3," there isn't really an x; it's just a language that allows a problem to be solved. In the same sense, when your brain tells you that you "aren't good enough," it's just trying to let you know about the perceived risks in a situation. You can train your brain to use more accurate language over time by challenging the language it uses when you're in the Explore phase.

A simple starting point is to reframe any self-deprecating thoughts into risk assessment advice. For example, "I'm not smart enough for that job," becomes, "I can use the job application process to figure out what more I need to learn." Look underneath the original thoughts and try to discover the intention your subconscious mind had in creating the thought in the first place. Your brain probably isn't trying to make you feel badly about yourself. It's probably trying to help. It just doesn't yet have more accurate language to express this.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Paying close attention to the language you use with yourself and others becomes a must when you start to see yourself having expectations. We will discuss the link between language and expectations in a minute.

Predicting the future is a natural human trait; we do it to avoid risks, learn more quickly, and plan to achieve goals. This particular skillset is unique to only a few animals, of which humans are one, and can be very helpful in making the most out of life. Like all such gifts, however, it comes with a potential cost and does not always lead us to a healthy place.

When you believe a thought, it becomes your reality. When you believe a prediction, it becomes an expectation; a future-based reality that you've become certain of. Predictions are just another type of thought, no truer than any other, yet for some reason we have developed into a species that generally lacks awareness of the difference between a prediction and reality. Expectations are a prediction that you've coated in unreasonable certainty.

I say unreasonable because anything that doesn't line up with what actually happens in reality is unreasonable. It lacks reason, sense, and sanity if it doesn't match the evidence of reality. So if my

expectation is “Mark should do the dishes tonight because I did them last night,” and Mark doesn’t do the dishes, my expectation was unreasonable. It may be reasonable to want Mark to do the dishes, in the sense that it would be a fair division of housework, but it’s unreasonable to believe it exists in reality when it clearly doesn’t. Just because I want something doesn’t make it true, and many people struggle to fully understand this basic concept. You might think that it would be great for Santa Clause to be a real person, but this doesn’t mean your desire is reasonable.

When it comes to truly embracing the Explore phase and the value of curiosity, expectations are another of your main barriers to success. As aikido sensei Donald N. Levine says, the only way you will ever feel disappointed, bored or frustrated is if your expectation does not match reality (www.observer.com/2016/01/how-one-aikido-sensei-changed-my-life-and-17-of-his-life-lessons/). You will feel like reality got it wrong because something else should have happened; you will blame reality for your hardship instead of realizing that your inability to accept reality is what causes your pain. During an expectation, there is a distinct absence of the value of acceptance, a value that describes how close you are to reality.

Here, we see the power of language. When you say things like “should” and “could,” you attach a sense of certainty to your prediction and are now living in a fictional reality. Particularly be careful about using the word “should,” as it creates an alternate (fake) reality every time you use it. You cannot use the word should in connection to something that is actually real; it is always a fictional word, yet you attach certainty to it. In my opinion, we should remove should from our vocabulary, in all languages. Particularly in past tense — “that should not have happened” — as this will always be complete bullshit. The past is unchangeable, so there is no such thing as should not have.

THE PROBLEM WITH TRUST

Let’s talk about a fictional concept called trust. Have you ever stopped to really ponder what trust is all about? Essentially, trust is an expectation. When you trust someone, you are saying you expect them to behave in a predictable way. Despite the massive evidence that humans are surprisingly unpredictable at an individual level, and despite personality-profiling proving it’s still almost impossible to predict a single individual’s behavior with one hundred percent accuracy, you still believe in trust. Have you ever wondered why that is?

Where I see trust reap the most carnage is in relationships. We love someone and trust them to not betray that love. But what does “betrayal” actually mean? It means they have failed to live up to your expectations about their behavior. Sure, you may have an agreement or even a legal contract of some kind, like a marriage, but none of this guarantees your prediction of the future is accurate. Betrayal is completely self-generated. A person does not actually commit an act of betrayal. They were simply unpredictable and you can’t let go of how certain you were. That’s what makes it hurt.

When my first long-term girlfriend broke up with me, I was emotionally devastated. I remember chain-smoking three cigarettes in a row while I explained it to my best friend on the phone. I was numb. I couldn’t process the complete surprise of it because I had thought everything was fine. This meant I had an expectation that our relationship would last longer. If I had somehow known from the beginning of the relationship that it was going to end on that date, I might still have been sad and grieved, but I wouldn’t have been so completely devastated by it. What’s the difference between those two scenarios? Only the variable of whether my expectation matched reality.

When you are curious, there must be an absence of trust. To be genuinely exploring, you must expect the unexpected and let go of fictional notions of how life should be. Life has no idea what it's going to be until it happens. There are billions of variables affecting every single particle in existence, so to think you can predict something accurately is obscenely delusional. Sure, you might get it sort of right, like a weather presenter being almost right when they say it will be sunny tomorrow, but ultimately the deep truth in detail will be far different than what you predicted, like the number of clouds, the exact temperature of the air, and the hundreds of direction changes made by the wind.

This does not mean it's impossible to make commitments or to believe something a person says. When understand that everything only applies to the present moment you will find more peace. When someone says, "I love you," simply recognize that what they're really saying is, "Right now I feel like I love you," and not, "I promise to love you forever." If you want my advice, I suggest you challenge anyone who promises to feel any particular way in the future or to behave in a way that can be predicted. You can simply say to them, "I don't need, or believe in, promises. Just do your best to live with integrity and we will see how it goes."

An expectation is trust multiplied. You trust in your prediction, meaning you trust what you trust. What a fictional nightmare! Think about someone "letting you down," someone who disappoints you with their behavior. Did they actually do something wrong? Or, were you so attached to your prediction of their behavior being more positive that you simply refuse to accept the reality of who they are right now?

Their behavior is the only thing that's real about them; anything else is made up in your mind and never existed at all. It never existed! Being disappointed in someone's behavior is about as rational as being mad at them because you had a dream where they hurt you.

For more on this topic, check out www.theinspirationallifestyle.com/trust-issues-how-to-read-people-and-avoid-betrayal/.

THERE IS NO PAST OR FUTURE

Anything distant from current-moment reality is fiction. Read that again. Any future prediction you make is entirely fictional. And any memory of the past is so biased it might as well be fictional. The only reality is the present moment, and given all your filters and biases, you'll be lucky if you're even able to experience that somewhat objectively.

When you notice yourself thinking the word should, stop and take note. You are now living in a fantasy world that has never existed and will never exist. The more time you spend there, the more likely it will become unhelpful and painful for you. The language you're using has taken you there. Luckily, language can also be used to bring you back to reality.

If you find yourself using that fictional language, you can use reality language to bring yourself back to the present moment. When you notice yourself expecting things in the future or regretting things in the past, simply ask yourself, "What is real right now?" and answer that question as accurately as possible. Describe the evidence in front of your senses using present-tense language, such as, "This is here now," "I can see this," and, "He is currently doing that." Bring yourself back from the lunacy that comes from believing that the past can be changed or the future can be predicted. Avoid adding the "because…" story to peoples' behavior. That will only be another fiction you create. Let go of cause and effect and just observe things as they are.

Even planning should be held onto only lightly. Think back ten years ago to what you thought your plan for life was (if you had one). Did you get it right? Are you what you expected yourself to be, really? Your powers of prediction are limited to a small amount of time at best. Every second that goes by undermines the accuracy of your previous plans, so to cling to plans without curiosity, without looking for updates, is a sure-fire way to get stuck in misery and lose all forward momentum.

EXPLORING – Wrapping It Up…

Throughout this book I've referenced a ton of my insecurities, weaknesses and failures. I like to bring these up as often as possible because it helps me to eliminate the shame I've attached to them and because I know you'll relate to at least some of them.

What I'd like to talk about now is actually one of my strengths, one I've had as long as I can remember and might possibly be the very core value that saved me from a potentially shitty life — curiosity.

As far back as I can remember, I've nearly always been looking for better ways to live. One reason I excelled academically at school is because I'm an enthusiastic problem solver. I try not to see something as "finished." I aim to ask how it could be improved and what could be done to make it more effective. Every job I've ever had involved me re-writing the processes that everyone worked by to make them better. It's probably what attracted me to a brief stint in Quality Assurance. I just love asking questions!

My naturally strong ability to live by the value of curiosity led me to explore ever deeper the dissatisfaction I was experiencing for a majority of my life. I would attach acceptance to curiosity, so when others were asking, "Why is this happening to me?" I would be asking, "What am I going to do about it? What's a better way? What would happen if I tried x, y and z?" And nowhere better was this value demonstrated than my life-long mission to connect with women.

In high school my Nice Guy Syndrome started to form into a persona. I started to take pride in being the "lovely" guy that made everyone laugh and solved every problem. I received so much external validation for this behavior that I became strongly invested in it. I might have continued being that way my whole life, like some of my older clients, but thanks to a natural predisposition toward curiosity, a seed of doubt was always there driving me forward.

After my high school relationship of two and a half years ended, I was lost in my Nice Guy-ness. I was simply unable to connect well with anyone, let alone women I was attracted to. In my darkest moments, I suspected I was a psychopath, partly because I had repressed emotion so much that I felt nothing, but also partly because I felt alone all the time, even in crowds. As Robert Pronge, the famous ice cream truck killer from The Iceman story, said, "I only feel alone around other people." I was so disconnected that I started to believe I was an alien of some kind.

But that didn't stop me looking. I never believed that I had arrived at a final answer, so I kept searching. This led me into the dubious world of Pick Up, where I learned how to systematically manipulate people into being attracted to me. I was "good" at it too; it got me laid a bunch of times and my social circle increased dramatically. Like others who fell for this snake oil, I could have stayed a Pick Up Artist for the rest of my life, desperately seeking approval from women while evermore alienating myself from them. Thankfully, I never stopped searching for a better answer.

At first, this just led me to try different styles of manipulation — or "game," as the PUAs like to call it — and I went from one method of neediness to another. But eventually I stumbled upon "direct game," which involved being more honest, at least about attraction if not intentions. I experimented with this and found it wholeheartedly more rewarding than pretending to be disinterested, which most of the other forms of Pick Up game recommended. Yet still, despite the massive progress I thought I was seeing, I kept asking, "What else is there? What's a better way?"

Finally, we arrive where I am at today — a huge proponent of honest and vulnerable leadership and someone who is firmly anti-manipulation. Instead of manipulating people into liking me, I use extreme honesty to force them to decide whether they genuinely love or hate me. I believe now that rejection does not exist; how people react to me is merely a measure of my authenticity, and I try to use my honesty to polarize people as much as possible.

As I result, I am in my first loving committed relationship since that first fateful and needy high school experience, and every time I feel like I'm hiding something, I share it with her. The connections I have with others are few but deep. It's rare for me to have superficial conversations these days. I've never felt this emotionally healthy in my entire life. But…

I will keep searching.

Maybe one day I will not be a coach. Maybe I will discover a new level of honesty never before seen. I'm even open to the idea that one day I'll think it's absurd to be honest and live by values (though that one does feel like a keeper). My experiences with curiosity have taught me one lesson over and over again. Whatever I think is true now will be completely destroyed in the future.

I will keep looking to overturn the next stone, unveil the next mystery, and reveal the next answer. I have learned beyond a doubt that curiosity must be maintained forever because there is always another answer. No matter what, if you ask every question you can possibly ask, you must eventually solve the problem. It's simply a matter of value-stamina. Can you be curious without giving up? Can you keep searching forever, simply to enjoy the journey?

If you take away one thing from this book, I hope it's this. There is always more truth to be found. Enjoy the search.